MOINA

A DETECTIVE STORY

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SHADOWED BY THREE"

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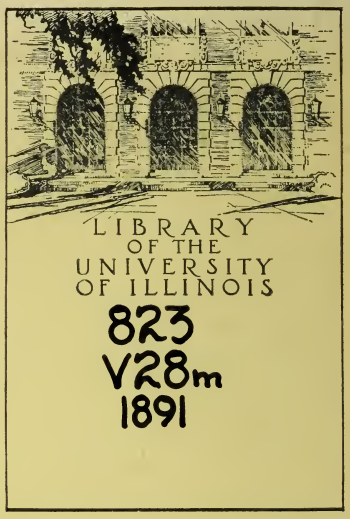

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A Detective Story.

BY

LAWRENCE L. LYNCH,

AUTHOR OF

"SHADOWED BY THREE," "THE DIAMOND COTERIE," "A MOUNTAIN MYSTERY," ETC., ETC.

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MOINA.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT GUEST.

"EH! What's this? Oh, there you are, eh!"

For answer only a sharp click; it seems to stimulate the speaker, and he puts out a hand and snatches up a revolver that has lain ready on a table beside the bed.

The situation is not a common one. Neither is it so uncommon as many easy-going people would like to believe.

A bed-chamber, large and luxurious, in the middle of the room, a bed in which a man sits very straight, with rumpled hair and night-shirt awry. Close beside the bed another man, large and muscular, one can see at a glance. His garb a coarse home-spun, his face hidden behind a blue silk handkerchief, with holes cut through where the eyes look out, but with no opening for the mouth. One can breathe easily enough through that thin fabric, and it seems to muffle and change the voice wonderfully well. Over the blue handkerchief a close fitting silk cap is pulled down. The hands are gloved in coarse cotton, and one of them holds a big pistol pointed suggestively at the head of the occupant of the canopied bed, while the other puts a dark lantern down upon coverings at the bed's foot, while he says coolly—

"Better look at that weapon before you make much fuss. I wonder what you take me for?"

"Umph!" grunts the occupant of the bed. "For a —— —— burglar, of course, and a confounded impudent one." And then as he turns his attention to the weapon in his hand, "Curse you, you've emptied my revolver." His eyes blaze with sudden anger; for a moment he sits looking at the weapon in his hand, then he turns sharply upon his nocturnal visitor.

"Well, what have you taken?"

The man in the mask started perceptibly.

"Stolen!"—then with a sudden drop of the voice, "Oh—nothing yet."

"Nothing! Well, why don't you begin?" Then suddenly he sprang from the bed with the revolver clubbed in his hand, the sudden movement overthrew the burglar's lantern, and the fellow moved back a pace and stooped to catch it as it fell.

Then there was a blow, a fall, and the two men were rolling upon the floor in a fierce struggle.

Presently the grasp of one of them relaxed, and he rolled over upon his back gasping under the strong hand of the other, who knelt above him grim as fate.

"Look here," said the champion, "I don't want to *kill* you, old man; but if you don't stop this you'll force me to it."

No answer, only the gleam of angry eyes and an ineffectual struggle. Then as he fell back—

"Do you think," he panted, "that I'll stand aside and see myself robbed?"

The burglar uttered an oath and put one hand to his head, which was aching dizzily from the blow dealt by the clubbed pistol.

"I think you're a cursed gritty old cock," he muttered, looking about him uneasily in the darkness, and then putting out his hand to draw the dark lantern towards him, taking care to turn the open side upon the face of his captive and away from the bed. Afterward the assailed man recalled the act. Then for a moment the two were silent, each peering at the other, the blue handkerchief had been loosened in the struggle, and the fellow put up one gloved hand and fingered it uneasily, keeping the other all the time upon the old man's throat.

"Look here," he said at last, "what will you do if I let you up?"

"Protect my property," was the prompt reply.

Suddenly the unoccupied hand of the burglar brought into view the threatening revolver.

"Look a here," he said, "I could make a finish of you in half a minnit with this, clean out this house, and get off safe. You know it. But maybe you've thought I didn't. You're alone in this house; I might fire off this pistol half-a-dozen times and 'twouldn't be heard outside through these thick stone walls. I might a gutted yer old plate pantry before I came near ye, instead of comin' *here* first. I might a drugged ye if I hadn't been too confounded sure that ye were sound asleep. But I didn't, and here we are, you and I, you haint lost nothing, and I haint made nothing—yet. Ye can offset the broken lock on yer area door and a cut pane of glass inside, against this crack on the head that you've give me, if ye think it worth while. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You've give me a *hurt*, I'll admit it, and I want to get where I can tend to it."

"Before it gets so big that we can identify you by it easily, eh?"

"Ye can say that if ye like. The question's this: will ye stay right here on the floor for a good twenty minutes by the watch, and give me yer promise not to get up nor make a loud noise, nor try by any dodge to give the alarm while I get away?"

"With my property?——*no, sir.*"

"Dang yer property. I believe you cursed rich fellers wallers yer money ahead of yer lives. I think more o' my head than of yer old money; keep yer *property* for this time; I won't touch a thing in the house; all I want is to git out of it."

The other stirred restlessly.

"I see ye don't like it; and there's another thing you are to promise, that ye won't set the police on my track, or to trouble me in any way."

"And if I won't?"

Click spoke the revolver in the burglar's hand.

"I can't stop to parley with you. If you won't you won't, you'll stay here just the same, only you'll stay so long that somebody'll come to hunt for you, and the newspapers will report how the dead body of Mr. Elias Lord, the wealthy banker, was found lying in a pool of blood, with a gaping pistol wound, etc., etc. Come, one way or the other, you're bound to stay here; will you stay with the pool of blood and gaping wound, or without?"

During this harangue, Elias Lord had found time to think, and he now said without any sign of fear, "I'll stay without."

The burglar shifted the bull's-eye until it shone upon a little bronze clock upon a mantel opposite them.

"It's just half-past one," he said, "does the thing strike the hour?"

"Yes."

"Well—when it strikes *two* you may get up and be your own master. Sorry to leave you like this, but I'll come again, perhaps."

"Do," said the old man, grimly, "I'll be ready for you."

Elias Lord was not the man to break his word, even when it was extorted by a burglar. And he lay upon the floor almost motionless for long minutes. The room was now in total darkness, and he could do nothing but think.

What a fool he had been to stay in that great house alone, and with doors and windows that were not burglar proof; why had he not a burglar alarm? One thing was certain: he would be ready for the next visitor of that sort. He would see that nothing was lacking that could protect or help make his house secure. He would investigate those wonderful much-lauded safe locks and window fastenings.

Tick, tick, how slow the time went! It was not for his plate that he cared so much; and as for money, well, he *would* be a fool to have much money about him. But those papers, they were in his pocket-book, together with such money as he had, with drafts, and cheques and notes. If those papers had been stolen—well, he had learned another lesson. He would have one of those tiny safes, just such another as was in his private office, let into the wall of his bed-room.

Tick, tick, tick, would that clock ever strike! How like a fool he must look lying there in the dark, and his bed not two feet from him. He was getting chilly, too.

Well he was glad that no one need know of this night's business. The burglar need not fear, he would never tell the story. Heavens, how ludicrous, how absurd! *How* it would look in cold print!

After all, had he not taken the wisest course? If Mrs. Ralston and Madeline Payne were to hear of this, would they not fear to make his house their home? Even now they were on their way in mid ocean, what would they say if they were greeted with such a tale as this?

Tick. He forgot about the time while he thought of the changes these two women would bring into his house, if only they could be prevailed upon to come. It had been a home to Mrs. Ralston when his wife was its mistress, and now that these two, his wife's cousin and the fair young woman who had been her companion for more than two years, were coming back to New York, why should they not come to him?

They must live somewhere, and they had asked him to find them a suitable home. For more than a year, ever since his wife's death, this great house had been closed, he had lived in it almost alone. Yes, he would open the house at once, he would fill it with servants, refurnish, repair, it should be ready for them.

One, two.

He was on his feet in an instant, sleep was out of the question. He groped his way to the mantel, found a match, and lighted the gas, letting it burn dimly while he dressed.

He was really chilled, and he hastened to touch a match to the fuel laid ready in the open grate. As it began to crackle and blaze and send forth a ruddy glow, he stood before it stretching himself and enjoying its warmth.

"I think I'll look about a little," he muttered, and turned and set the gas jets to flaring brightly.

What is it that catches his gaze and holds it as he stands with his hand still upraised beneath the chandelier and facing his bed—something white, something coldly glittering? He goes toward it slowly as if fascinated. He pauses by the side of the bed, and looks, and looks, with both hands dropped at his side.

"Great Heavens!"

He sits down weakly upon the bedside, and still looks at the thing that glitters in the wood just above the pillow where he lay when aroused by the burglar.

"The *burglar!* Was he a burglar, after all?"

Presently he puts up a hand and touches the gleaming thing: it quivers and vibrates, a touch displaces it, and in his fingers he holds a long, keen, slender dagger; while the letter which it had pierced and pinned to the carven board above his sleeping head, falls and lies before his startled eyes upon the pillow. A letter pinned against his bed's head with a dagger. Not a toy, but a weapon keen, firm, whetted to slay.

And this was the mission of the man whom he had mistaken for a mere burglar. Mechanically he lifts the dagger, examines its keen edge, its slender hilt. Ruthlessly he tests it upon the polished wood of the bed, how it cuts its way, how pliant it is, how strong! He puts the weapon down upon the pillow beside the letter, which he does not even touch. His face is very grave now, and paler than it has been at any moment since his awakening. He goes to the mantel, and there lights a small brass lamp. With this in hand, he goes about the room examining everything.

"I must be *sure*," he mutters.

Nothing is disturbed about the room; he peers into back rooms and closets, and then he goes out into the hall, locking his door and taking the key with him. Then, slowly he makes the tour of the house. Nothing is disturbed. All is as it has been for weeks—yes, months. Ever since his wife's death the splendid rooms have been closed, all save his own apartments, the dining-room and the library. For months it has been his habit to breakfast down town at his club or at a convenient café, to lunch wherever it happened, and to dine and sleep in his own house, going straight from his dressing-room to

his carriage in the morning, and seldom returning before six o'clock. His cook and housemaid, the only house servants he had retained, made a pretence of sleeping in the house; but they found it dreary, and as their services were not required early in the day, they had asked and easily obtained permission to sleep at their homes, going at night and returning about midday.

When he had convinced himself that nothing was amiss, and that his mysterious visitor had left no trace behind him, Elias Lord returned to his own room and locked himself in.

The trouble in his face had deepened, and its pallor had increased. He sat down upon the bed, and holding the dagger in his hand, reviewed in his mind the words of the burglar, trying to recall his voice and manner.

"How clearly I see it now," he mused. "That man had no designs upon my money or valuables; he might have made me lie here while he robbed my house if he had chosen. And he had no wish to take my life. Why, then, did he risk his own safety merely to place this letter in my room. Clearly it was to prove to me how entirely I was at his mercy had he chosen to strike. How easy it will be to put an end to me at his pleasure. Well!" he arose and looked about him. "I realize *now* the gravity of the step I have taken—but it *is* taken. I shall not draw back; I could not if I would."

He put out his hand and took up the letter from his pillow.

"I must read it, I suppose," he said, reluctantly.

It was a folded sheet, without envelope, which he opened as if eager to have done with it. Every word stood out in characters that were as plain as print, and the words were few.

"*Elias Lord, Sir,*

"As the head of a new league for the oppression of the poor and the upholding of the rich, it is in your power to say how far their oppressions shall go. Be warned in time, use your authority wisely, pay careful heed to the notes of warning or requests that will find their way to you from time to time. Let this letter prove that you *cannot escape* us. Use your power to help us, and *live.* Hurt us, and your last hour follows the deed. Our eyes are ever upon you; *we never sleep.*"

There was no signature, the strange document was written upon a plain square of white paper, and in a copy-book hand that was as characterless as print.

Having read it, Elias Lord pondered long. He was a man of prompt action, of strong character. He knew what this ghastly warning meant, and had no inclination to treat it other than seriously. Sitting there with the letter in his hand, and the gleaming dagger before him, what he thought was practically this:—

Here am I, Elias Lord, with an immense fortune which I have won by my own industry and energy, with large interests in factories, and workshops, and foundries, and here is a great faction of disappointed labourers and of rascals who won't labour. These men have leagued together to extort money from me, not because they have a right to it, but because I *have* it and they *want* it. They've been

fighting me, and others like me, for *years*, and now when I am finally driven in self-defence to take a stand against them, when I have allied myself to a society which promises me and my property protection, they come with a deadly threat—I must use my position in this society to serve them or suffer dire consequences.

That the enemy is strong and has its emissaries everywhere is proved by their knowledge of the fact that I am known to be an officer of the new league before I have been such three days. That they are in deadly earnest is proved by this knife and this letter.

So it is to be war, stern war, between myself single-handed, but forewarned, and an unknown enemy. Very good. I have wronged none of them ; I owe no man anything ; I will fight for my own. Let them do their worst !

CHAPTER II.

IN LONDON.

THE pleasantest time of year to be in London is, no doubt, in "the season"—that mystical time when the odour of society, wealth, fashion is all about, and all the visible world—visible, that is, from Mayfair, Belgravia, the Row, the Gardens—lives for naught but pleasure.

But even the season has its better days and its best. Its better, when everybody is in town, and the dowagers know how to lay down their lines, and arrange their dinner lists ; and its best, when, after the Easter recess and the reassembling of "the House," politics become of secondary interest to society, and even politicians give themselves over to dining, and going about in the train of fair and stately dowagers—willingly, or unwillingly, what matters ?—only the outside and visible is of consequence in Mayfair, in "the season."

And yet, on one of the best, the fairest, the gayest days of the gay season, in a pleasant house in the Belgravia district, with the odour of fashion rising to his very nostrils, the whirl of fashion surging to and fro beneath his gaze, one man stood looking idly out upon gay London, and seeing not its gaiety.

He was a tall spare man, erect in spite of his age, which was far past middle life. His face was pale, and had once been very handsome, the hair, brushed straight back from a high white brow, was fine and soft, slightly waving, snowy-white, and so long that its curling ends rested upon the velvet collar of his rather unfashionable "frock" coat.

His face was beardless, and the thin cheek as smooth as that of a boy. The mouth was fine, and thin lipped ; the eyes dark, and capable of many expressions. The face, in fine, was, at all times, refined, intellectual, the face of a man well born, well bred ; usually, the dark eyes looked out upon the world with dreamy melancholy, but sometimes they lighted up with a strange intensity of scorn and bitterness and stern resolve. At such moments, the stately old man with the gently dignified demeanour, the low voice

and kindly half smile, became another being. The erect form seemed to grow more erect, to expand with vital force, the slender old hands were alive with nervous gesture, the thin lips set themselves in two scornful lines, the eyes flashed and blazed, and the slow voice grew ringing, clear, and strong with the strength of the enthusiasm that swayed him.

Such to see was Miles la Croix, as he stood that fair morning looking out upon fashionable London, and seeing it not.

"Father," a step, a voice, and the sound of a closing door; all these were not enough to rouse him from his reverie.

"*Father*," this time a firm white hand upon his arm brought him back to the every-day world with a start, and instantly a tender smile routed the dreamy look from his fine old face.

"Ah! so you have been dreaming again. And I caught you fairly. Where *now*, father dear? but, never mind. You shall confess to me by and by. You are wanted below, dear."

"Wanted—below?" the old man passed his hand across his white brow, and looked down upon the girl beside him. "Who—who is it, Moina?"

"Monsieur Passauf."

"Passauf!" the old man started. "Only he, my daughter?"

"As yet. He spoke of Mr. Crashaw as if he expected to find him here. Father," hesitatingly, "is there anything amiss?"

"No, no, Moina. Amiss—why, surely not! what could be amiss *here?*" he was already at the door, and he turned with his hand upon the latch. "It's only a little discussion, Crashaw set the hour for it, and I—I had quite forgotten. You—you will remain here, my daughter?"

The girl laughed lightly.

"When did I ever intrude unasked, father mine, when your guests were—Jules Passauf and Mr. Crashaw?" then, seeing the look in his eyes, "There, dear, never mind me. Mr. Crashaw is too statistical for unpractical me, I suppose; that is all; don't mind whims. You know I am always ready at *your* call."

And then, as he turned and went silently out, she dropped into a seat beside the window, murmuring under her breath, "All the same, I *do* detest you, Monsieur Rufus Crashaw!" she dropped her cheek upon her hand, the same fair firm hand that had recalled her father from his mental wandering, and a very serious look crept into her face. "I wonder what they have come for," she mused. "Oh, I wish they were not"—she checked the rebellious thought and lifted her head. "I am an unworthy daughter of my father," she said, aloud, "and a weak sister of the oppressed." She pushed the window further open, and leaned out, looking up and down. "How beautiful it all is!" she sighed.

And then she started back from the window. "Bah, he has spoiled it all! Ah," here she nodded as if to some one in the street below, "he has seen me, I must go and let him in. *Ugh!*"

A moment later she was holding the street door wide open for a stout man, who entered briskly, and greeted her with a nod and a crisp, "How de do, Miss Moina," pulling at a pair of adhesive gloves

the while. "Fine day," went on the new comer. "By the way, congratulations are in order, of *course*. Wish you much pleasure in your good fortune, Miss La Croix."

"Thanks," said the girl, composedly.

"I fancy you won't play at being your own handmaiden any longer, eh—at any rate, not *much* longer. *Ah!*" a glove came off at the syllable, and he at once began to wrestle with its mate.

"And why not, Mr. Crashaw?"

She was leading the way toward the little back room where she knew her father and Jules Passauf awaited him, and she flung the question back over her shoulder.

"Why not? oh, well, because it isn't the custom of the country, for one thing; an English heiress, you know—"

"I'm *not* an English heiress, sir, and as for the customs of the country—" she threw open the door of the little back room, dropped a curtsey, with her eyes upon her father's face, and then demurely announced—

"Mr. Crashaw."

When that gentleman had crossed the threshold, she dropped a second curtsey, drew the door shut, and went back to her window above stairs, smiling slightly, and with a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

Rufus Crashaw entered the small room with the air of a man assured of his welcome. He merely nodded to Passauf, but he greeted his host, who rose to receive him with stately courtesy, with his nearest approach to respectful deference. He was a square shouldered, square featured man, strong and somewhat heavy; in his rugged face shrewdness and force, a strong will, prompt and indomitable energy were strongly indicated, and a goodly amount of confidence in Rufus Crashaw spoke in his eyes, his voice, and his manner.

Brisk, brusque, energetic—these words were frequently applied to Rufus Crashaw, and they fitted him well. His advice was considered worth the asking, and—quite another thing—the taking. His judgment was pronounced "sound." He was frequently mentioned as "a man to be relied upon." A man who knew the world, and who understood human nature. About the worst that was known or spoken of him was that he "took very good care of number one," was "fond of running things," and "pretty sure, sooner or later, of getting his own way." A good man to voyage with; an unpleasant "breaker" to buffet against. For the rest, he was well dressed, well mannered, after his fashion, well informed, if not exactly well educated, and possessed of more *finesse* and tact than might have been expected from a man of his methods, when he saw fit to employ those subtle gifts.

Lastly, he was a man of middle age, and a bachelor; six months earlier he might have been described in the directory as Rufus Crashaw, ironmaster, with a long row of figures to indicate his value in pounds and shillings. Now, he was simply, "R. Crashaw, gentleman of leisure," and with an "independent fortune."

"Good-morning, Mr. La Croix. You are well, I hope. Ah, Passauf, you are here before me; punctual as ever. Well," he seated himself at the word, and laid the moist gloves across one knee, "are we ready for business?"

Mr. La Croix bowed, and resumed his seat near a small square table, upon which were scattered several maps, writing material, two or three long narrow books that looked like records, or list books, and a number of newspapers, mostly foreign. Jules Passauf, a little dark man, with small keen eyes looking out from a little face almost lost in a short but thick growth of beard, drew his chair up to the table with a quick jerk, and mechanically took up a pen.

"Not yet, Passauf," interposed Crashaw, as he drew his own chair forward. "We will talk first, for ——" turning again to La Croix, "we have something to do; something to decide. I have here a letter from—*Sharlaw*."

"*Sharlaw!*"

"From SHARLAW!"

Both men started; La Croix was on his feet.

Crashaw quietly took a letter from his pocket, withdrew it from its envelope, opened it, and held it out to Passauf.

"It is in our cipher," he said. "You're better at *de*ciphering it than I—no pun intended I assure you. Read it." Then, with a gesture commonly used by him when he found it necessary to recall any of his words, "Or, wait. La Croix, you have had your seven days. Have you decided?"

The old man had resumed his seat, and dropped his head upon his hand.

"You had *my* decision seven days ago, Mr. Crashaw; they were *your* seven days, not mine."

"Well, well! you know what I mean. Have you decided for your daughter, or has she decided for herself?"

Miles La Croix lifted his head. "Neither," he said, firmly. "I have not spoken to my daughter, Mr. Crashaw, since our last meeting. A change has come into my daughter's life. She has inherited, from her mother's sister, a fortune."

"Yes. I know that."

"You know it! How?"

Crashaw smiled.

"You forget," he said. "In such a matter as this it would be strange if I did *not* know. Your daughter is—one of us."

"Not quite."

"Well—that is not *her* fault. But we are wasting words;" he turned again to Passauf.

"Give me the letter," he said; and his face settled into sternness.

Without one glance at the document, already open in his hand, Jules Passauf gave it back into the hand outstretched to take it, and turned his keen little eyes, and expressionless face, upon Miles La Croix.

Rufus Crashaw refolded the letter, replaced it in its envelope, and laid it down upon the table at his elbow. Then he turned a cool gaze upon the old man opposite him.

Miles La Croix was trembling visibly now, and drops of sweat stood out upon his temples; but he met the cold eyes squarely, and his own were unwavering.

Presently Crashaw withdrew his gaze, and taking up the letter

began to trifle with it, his hand resting upon the table between them. Finally he spoke very mildly.

"So—after all, La Croix, you are going to lose your opportunity. *You!*"

Miles La Croix did not withdraw his mute gaze.

"It's *too* bad," murmured Crashaw, as if to himself.

Suddenly the old man arose, and stood erect, but trembling still, before the two men, looking from one to the other as he spoke.

"Crashaw, Passauf; you know me, and you know the desire of my heart. If I stood before you to-day a solitary man, a man with no ties, no vows to break, there is nothing that lay within my power, nothing that my intellect could grasp, or my strength compass, that I would hesitate to undertake. America, India, Australia, the uttermost parts of the earth, all are alike to me! If I possessed a hundred millions, I would put them all into the treasury of the *great cause*, and set forth alone and penniless upon its humblest mission!" he broke off abruptly, and sank panting into his seat, a flame of crimson had replaced the pallor in his face, his eyes were glowing almost fiercely; he looked at them again silently for a moment, the hand which had rested upon the table as he sank down was still trembling.

"Do you believe me?" he demanded, hoarsely.

Crashaw made a quick gesture, which Passauf seemed readily to interpret.

"La Croix—my dear friend," he exclaimed warmly, "*we* believe your lightest word. You — why, man, you look ill! Passauf—" but Jules Passauf was already at the door, which he opened hastily, calling, with his face thrust out, and his body still within the room—

"Mademoiselle! oh, Mademoiselle La Croix!" and then, as a clear voice sounded a quick answer, "Come! come quick, and bring water!"

Then, while the old man dropped his head upon his hand, and Rufus Crashaw and Jules Passauf exchanged swift glances, light steps came down the passage, and Moina La Croix, a glass of water in her hand, came swiftly into the room.

Not one glance did she give to the two who now stood respectfully near the old man; instead, she hastened to his side, and lifting his bowed head, gently held the glass to his lips.

"Papa! This is *too* bad! and just when you were doing so well!"

The old man drank the water greedily, and in a moment lifted his head and smiled upon the fair girl, whose arm still rested about his neck; seeing which she put down the half-drained goblet, and turned swiftly upon Rufus Crashaw.

"Mr. Crashaw—is there any *real* necessity for interviews *now?* Just now, when he was recovering so nicely? Did not you promise me ——"

She stopped abruptly. Mr. Crashaw had taken up the letter, the reading of which he had so lately bidden, and forbidden, and held it out to her with a deferential bow.

"Miss La Croix, you will find my reason there."

The girl drew away from him a little.

"What is it?" she asked coldly.

"A letter."

"I see—a letter."

"A letter—*from the master.*"

"Ah!" the girl's face flushed, and she drew away yet further; so that she stood directly behind her father's chair.

"From *him!*" she breathed, "and does it—does it concern—us?"

"Yes; all of us."

"What! you, I—*my father?*"

"Your father first and most. You, I—Passauf here. Well, I was about to let Passauf read it aloud. *You* may read, Miss Moina."

She shot him a quick glance, and drew the letter from its envelope. Then she looked down at her father. His head had dropped once more upon his hand. Again her eyes sought the face of Rufus Crashaw, even while she shook open the flimsy sheet.

"Perhaps you would rather read it for yourself, *first*," he suggested.

Without a nod or another glance she withdrew the hand that rested upon her father's shoulder, and, moving back a pace, began to scan rapidly the closely written pages. Then, suddenly, all the life and colour died out of her face. She put up a hand to stifle the cry that rose to her lips, and the letter fluttered from her fingers to the floor.

Across the face of Crashaw came a look of consternation, and he turned to meet the calm little eyes of Jules Passauf, who nodded reassuringly, and bent to take up the fallen letter, which he proffered again to the still motionless girl.

But she waved it away with a quick gesture, and then, suddenly, all the blood came surging back to her face, and into her great dark eyes came the burning look which made father and child so wonderfully alike.

"Father! oh, father, mine!" She flung herself down beside him, and drew his head down to her shoulder.

"Father, dear, it has come? It has come? Look up—don't you hear me? It has come, father, mine. The dream, *our* dream is to be realized at last! Good heavens! Help me, Passauf, he has fainted."

In another moment she had tenderly laid the senseless head upon the shoulder of Jules Passauf, and flown from the room in search of a restoring cordial.

As she vanished across the threshold a wolfish look came into the face of Rufus Crashaw.

"Fool!" he whispered sharply; "give me that letter."

With a perfectly immovable face the man thus savagely addressed held out the letter.

Crashaw took it, and at once changed his tone.

"*She* would not have understood—but he. It must be *read* to him. See." He held the letter up before the eyes of Passauf, who bent forward, near-sightedly, to look—not upon the closely written words that covered the last page, but at the lower right-hand corner, as was indicated by Crashaw's extended finger.

And then he saw only this—a single round red blot that looked like *a drop of blood.*

CHAPTER III.

MASTER AND SCRIBE.

N Thames Street, that home of busy dealers, and goal of lesser endors, all is bustle and confusion. From early dawn to late afternoon the narrow, dingy, dirty street is thronged with eager buyers nd urgent sellers, while the fish boats come and go, and the air is aden with unpleasant odours.

Pushing his way through the throng at three o'clock in the afternoon, went a man who might have been a small and unusually well-mannered tradesman to judge by his dress; but no tradesman eager for a sharp bargain at the close of the day ever wrestled his way through Billingsgate, caring for its sights so little, and for its smells so much.

He was a small, thin man, with a quick nervous stride, and a habit of carrying his head a trifle bent, while a slight stoop of the shoulders made his stature seem less than it really was. He wore a long loose top-coat, which fluttered, as he walked, almost at his heels, and a wide-brimmed soft hat, pulled low down upon his forehead, concealed all of his face that was not otherwise hidden beneath a straggling growth of beard. His hands were carried in two deep pockets, possibly to conceal from the scornful gaze of Billingsgate the fact that he wore gloves.

On he struggled, into Lower Thames Street, past the Custom House and Billingsgate Fish Market, and finally in at the entrance to a towering building whose dingy façade fairly bristled with dingier windows. Up four flights of stairs, dark and steep, he toiled, slowly, like one who knows his way, to enter at last a small dark ante-room, the door of which he found locked, but which he opened promptly by the help of a key, one of a dozen, which jingled at the end of a leathern string. When he had closed the door behind him he found himself in total darkness; but again he was equal to the emergency, and a small gas burner was soon flickering at one side of the doorway, showing duskily the smallness of the room, the two wooden chairs standing stiffly against the wall at one side, and the tall old cabinet or wardrobe opposite.

Before this wardrobe the man stopped, having first examined a door on the side of the room opposite that by which he had entered, ending his investigation by shooting a tiny bolt noiselessly into its place, and then, with his hand upon the lock, he seemed for a moment to listen intently.

Satisfied, seemingly, with the silence about him, he once more selected a key from the leathern string, and with it opened the wardrobe. It was lined with plain deal boards, narrow, and well filled with hooks, and was otherwise quite empty. Touching one of these hooks, seemingly at random, two of the boards forming the back swung inward, showing a shallow cavity behind lined like the front, with deal boards, and similarly supplied with hooks.

Then, with swift movements, he took off the long coat and slouch hat and thrust them into the cavity. Another rapid motion, and the

hirsute covering dropped from his face and followed the hat and coat. A wig of unkempt hair came next, and then the aperture swung to, and the manipulator of this most convenient wardrobe moved a step towards the end nearest the outer door. Here a second hook served as a lever, and a panel again swung inward. This time the cavity revealed appeared to be well filled, for, thrusting in his hand, the man drew out a coat, which he donned, and which fitted him well; a hat of quite another style than that which he had discarded, and last, a clean and savoury handkerchief, a brush, a comb, and a tiny hand-mirror.

Having critically surveyed his face, and arranged his scant and closely-cropped hair, which was quite white, very soft and fine, and with a natural tendency to curl in spite of its brief length, he again drew on the gloves which he had removed upon entering, took off the well-brushed hat, and, after shutting the wardrobe and locking it as at first, he turned once more to the inner door.

A moment he stood beside it in silence, his ear close to the panel; then a smile of satisfaction came into his face, lighting it up in a wonderful way, and he tapped lightly three raps, and then noiselessly, as he had shot the bolt, he withdrew it. Another moment of waiting, and then a third key was applied, and the door pushed hastily open.

Standing upon the threshold of this inner room, the man paused the smile still upon his face.

What he saw was very simple: a large square room with dingy walls and ceilings, but scrupulously clean; a big square table of some thick dark wood occupied the centre of the room, a dozen chairs were ranged about it in stiff array; in two of the corners, those opposite the door of entrance, and between the windows, of which there were three, stood desks, five in all, and each unlike the other.

Four of these desks stood closed, and the seats before them empty. The fifth, a long narrow leaf falling low, and with rows of shelves ranged above it, each shelf piled full with small tin boxes, each box labelled and securely tied, was open, and before it sat a man who bent above the low desk, a pile of unopened letters near his left hand, and another of letters opened full, and piled in orderly fashion as if ready for filing, at his right elbow; upon the upper left-hand corner of the topmost of these last could be seen, in a large clear hand, the written words, "Answered, May 11th, etc., 18—."

The envelopes which had contained these letters were scattered upon the floor at the foot of the desk, just as they had been cast away by the quick hand of the scribe; and upon a small movable upright little rack, held securely in its place by a hinge at the top and a paper weight at the bottom, was an open letter, written in strange hieroglyphics, which the man at the desk was rapidly and easily transcribing into very legible English.

At the sound of the knock he had started slightly, but had not turned his head, and now, as the door swung inward, he did not pause in his work, and he gave no sign that he heard.

The man in the doorway smiled still as he looked across at the quiet figure with the automatic movement, glanced swiftly about the room, noting everything. At the windows, smoothly screened with some opaque white stuff, that admitted the light while it excluded

vision ; at the walls thickly hung with maps and charts ; at the vacant desks, and the bare table in the centre of the room ; and finally, at a desk placed diagonally across one corner, heavier and larger than the others, having two compartments, which were filled with pigeon holes and lettered boxes, and which, when swung open as they were at the moment, formed a wing at either end of the desk proper, and when closed, the outer surface of the desk.

Upon the open desk were placed, ready for use, pens, ink, and a supply of blue tinted paper, and in a most conspicuous position a stack of unopened letters was piled.

At sight of these the smile faded from the face of the new comer ; he closed the door and locked it with a quick hand, and in another moment was seated at the desk, drawing off his gloves with eager haste.

As he took up the first letter the automatic scribe put his pen behind his ear, closed his ink-bottle with a sharp click, and turned slowly half-round in his chair.

"Good-morning, your honour."

The man addressed put down the letter he had but that moment taken up.

"Well, Disset?"

The scribe held up an open letter.

"Well?" said the other again.

"From America," said the scribe.

"From America? Ah!" He sprang up and came to the side of the man he had called Disset, who remained seated, while the other caught the letter from his hand.

At sight of the opened sheet the colour forsook his face ; and yet, one glance could take in all that the sheet contained.

At the top of the page, faintly traced with a pen, was a noose with a running knot ; and at the bottom, in firmer outline was a date—*May 12th.*

CHAPTER IV.

BIOGRAPHICAL.

"MAY 12th," the face of the man hardened perceptibly ; he put down the sheet and went back to his desk. "We can do nothing, then," he said.

"Nothing—except offer a resolution in the——"

"Drop that, Disset. You and I need not cant."

The secretary turned back to his desk, and for some moments nothing was heard save the scratch of a pen, the sharp sound of a paper knife, and the rustle of folding and unfolding pages.

Presently the secretary spoke again. "Mr. Sharlaw."

"Well?"

"There is a message from Crashaw."

"Eh? What is it?"

"He will be here in an hour."

"*Will* he! and who was his messenger?"

"Passauf."

"Jules Passauf?"

"The same."

"What position does he occupy—relatively to Crashaw?"

"Very much that which I occupy relatively to *you*, Mr. Sharlaw."

"Ah! Indeed. The trusted and trustworthy confidential friend and secretary then."

No reply. The trusted and trustworthy was again scratching at his desk.

Mr. Sharlaw leaned back in his revolving chair and smiled. Stripped of the long ill-fitting coat, the low felt hat, and straggling whiskers, he was a man to look at twice, and to admire greatly. Small in stature, and delicately framed as he was, he presented an embodied argument in favour of the supremacy of mind over matter; strength of will; power to control; keenest insight; all were manifest in the deep-set eyes, the firm nostrils, the thin-lipped mouth, the square jaw, and clear-cut chin; in the firm grasp of the nervous white hands, in the very carriage of the man; and all this fire and force he habitually masked behind a manner that was courteously calm, or listlessly indifferent: two masks that are often worn by strong character and indomitable will. In all the world there were not a dozen persons to be found who *knew* Anton Sharlaw well—and by those few he was loved and trusted implicitly, or hated to the utmost.

Presently Sharlaw spoke again.

"Are there any letters from Glasgow or Dublin, Disset?"

"The mail is delayed to-day, sir."

"Is your summing-up of the late reports ready?"

"Not yet, sir. The change in our address has delayed me. Some of the reports have gone a long way round."

"So much the better." Sharlaw arose and came to the secretary's desk again.

"You have been careful to have no letters come directly here?"

"I have taken all possible precaution."

"And your own going and coming?"

"Is always by the rear entrance. I am taken for a gentleman's valet."

"Ah! really." Sharlaw laughed lightly. "Are there any letters that require my personal notice?"

"There are some here—shall I run over the list?"

"Yes."

From a long narrow slip of paper, closely written over, the scribe began to read in a tone that was quite expressionless, with a pause after each item, and, usually, a written note upon the margin of the slip, after the instructions of his chief had been heard in emotionless silence.

"From Cairo. No. 19, De Kayven reports strong feeling. Thinks a demonstration is just now very much needed."

"From Cairo!" a moment of silence, while Mr. Sharlaw opens a large book and runs his eye over a list of names.

"Put the matter into the department of Dr. Lossen."

"Umph! Lossen has just written for funds."

"From——"

"From Paris."

"Send him fifty pounds."

"Pardon. Drasky——"

"Let Drasky send it, then; it *is* in his department. What a memory you have, Disset."

"Wainwright reports the pamphlets exhausted in the provinces, and a need for more. They are for the most part well received."

"Let him be supplied at once."

"Wainwright suggests—for later circulation—a stronger pamphlet."

"Stronger—umph! Who wrote the last?"

"La Croix."

"Eh?"

"Miles La Croix."

"What, Crashaw's candidate?"

"The same."

"We will go back to La Croix again. Stop—do you know him?"

"Yes."

"I might have known it. Well, suggest, Disset, who shall write the stronger pamphlet?"

"I would suggest—Sharlaw."

Sharlaw laughed. "I might have known that, too. But, no; suggest again, Disset."

Disset turned in his chair. "There is a youth here—in London—who is the ideal of the rhythmic, the picturesque, the fiery, silver-tongued orator. I hope I quote correctly."

Sharlaw nodded and smiled.

"He has made one or two addresses to the—masses."

"Bah!"

"Oh they are by no means bad. He has also written a *brochure*—and submitted it."

"To whom?"

"To me. Will you read it? It is here."

"Have *you* read it?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Eh!"

"Your opinion, man."

"I think it good. That is—it's the thing Wainwright asks for, and done in good, strong, but somewhat luxuriant, English."

"Strong *and* luxuriant! We won't bite at words. Your judgment is sufficient. Who is this youthful author?"

"By name, Rene Savorin."

"Umph! Assumed?"

"I think not."

"No? A Frenchman, then."

"I think there is mixed blood."

"Describe him."

"Refined—a gentleman, twenty-one, or possibly two; slender and handsome enough for an opera tenor."

"Where does he live?"
"In lodgings—Jerymn Street."
"An income, then?"
"I believe so."
"You believe so?"
"Yes."
"He is a member, then?"
"Of the Third Division."
"Ah!—that!" Sharlaw left his desk and stood midway between it and Disset. "How long have you known Mr. Savorin?"
"I—or the order?"
"Both."
"The order some eight months. Myself—four months."
"How was he first brought to your notice?"
"Through Crashaw's friend, La Croix."
"Ah!"
"I think he is one of La Croix's converts."
"I see that you don't like this young fellow."
"I?"
"Yes, come! In a word, tell me what is the worst thing you know about him?"
"I have told you my best and worst. Mr. Rene Savorin is very young, very good-looking, tolerably rich, very enthusiastic, full of chivalry, full of fair feelings—enthusiasms—nice scruples." Disset turned back to his desk, and a queer smile came into the face upon which he thus turned his back. Then, suddenly the smile passed, Mr. Sharlaw grasped one of the chairs standing about the central table and brought it to the desk of the secretary.
"Now, Disset," he said, while he seated himself, "about this candidate of Mr. Crashaw's—this Miles La Croix."

CHAPTER V.

A SLIP OF PAPER.

THE secretary pushed back his chair, threw back his head to look at a clock high above him, and then began to arrange his desk, closing and locking it at last. Then he arose and went over to the table, where he also secured one of the wooden chairs, and drew it toward Mr. Sharlaw. As he moved one could see that he walked with a very decided limp; one limb seemed shorter than the other, and painfully mis-shapen.
"Miles La Croix is nearly seventy years old," he began. "He never speaks of his family, but he is said to have good blood in his veins—his father, they say, was a French adventurer of good family but fallen fortunes, and his mother was the daughter of a Florentine noble, a revolutionist. La Croix married an English gentlewoman, who died, leaving him with a little daughter two years old—Moina La Croix. La Croix in his youth inherited a competency from some female relative on the French side, I believe, and it was lost by some unhappy venture in which he represented the trusting amateur with a

little money to invest as against 'bloated capital,' with the usual result. La Croix has high notions, refined—one of those men who inspire confidence and draw friends from among the trusting, the confiding, and—the unhappy."

"Ah! a visionary!"

"Not altogether. Just enough of the practical in his talk to save him from that charge. He himself would probably plead guilty, if it were a crime, to be called an enthusiast."

"Well, go on; I see, at least, that *you* respect this La Croix."

"So does every man who knows him; except, perhaps—Rufus Crashaw; and I respect and admire his daughter Moina."

"Oh! There again! *Why* except Crashaw?"

"Because—— But wait until you have seen the two men. You will not need my explanation. You know men."

"Well, well! About the young lady, then? Moina La Croix—it's a pretty enough name!"

"And the owner is pretty enough to wear it well. But you know women, too—I dare say."

"Not to *your* knowledge, Disset. Go on. I choose to hear *your* version of the La Croix, father and child."

"Then I will put it into the fewest words possible. Miles La Croix is an honest man—a gentleman by nature and by grace. He is an honest believer in the rights of the people, An aristocrat born, he has known wealth and poverty. There was, I believe, some trouble about his marriage. His wife's friends had other views for her, and they were very wealthy. I have heard that his wife died in want, and that during their short married life they passed through many vicissitudes. It is said that he learned his lesson, and had a fine chance to study the woes of the working people at close range. He lived among them, and his wife died among them. All the kindness she knew in her latest hours was at the hands of those poorer than themselves. And at the same time, certain acts of untimely and unfeeling harshness upon the part of some of Madame La Croix's great relatives made upon Miles La Croix a lasting impression; the result you have in the present Miles La Croix. In looks and manners, in all his tastes and habits, an aristocrat—his *heart* is with the poor and the oppressed, and his voice against the wealthy oppressor, the titled aristocratic monopolist of labour, of capital, of bread-and-butter, of any of the good things of this world. If Miles La Croix can be regulated, kept within bounds, he ought to be a power for us—in America."

"So! After all, Disset, you have a faculty for putting things tersely. 'If he can be regulated'—what does that mean?"

"I have said that La Croix is an enthusiast, is a gentleman, and that he has a long-nurtured grievance. He is finely organized, capable of rising to great heights, and—you are putting him in leash with Crashaw."

"And you have spoken again like an oracle. His leash with Crashaw—— Well, pass that; what is the daughter like?"

"In face pale, with a fine red mouth, great dark eyes, and hair as black as possible. Tall, slender, and an enthusiast, like her father, whose disciple she is; she is only eighteen, but yet has travelled

much. She has gone with him everywhere; I dare say she knows more men than women. I even doubt if she has one woman friend. And yet she is as modest and sweet as a convent-bred maiden. She is frank, fearless, cordial. She is absolutely destitute of all little femininities, fine lady tricks learned at a finishing school."

"Upon my word, Disset, I didn't know it was in you to be so eloquent."

"No," said Disset, quite unmoved by this note of sarcasm. "I want you to know what she is, for if La Croix goes, *she* goes."

"Of course."

"And if she *goes*, she will become one of the workers."

"You think so?"

"You will think so when you know her. And, look here, Mr. Sharlaw. Moina La Croix, in spite of her lack of womanly companionship, is a most womanly creature. In spite of her continental journeyings and her male companionships, she is as pure as a baby—a woman at eighteen, absolutely unspotted from the world."

"Umph!" Mr. Sharlaw said nothing more. Instead, he went back to his desk and seated himself before it, and for some moments there was silence in the room. Then he spoke, but without turning or ceasing to write rapidly.

"What are La Croix's circumstances now?"

"Pecuniary?"

"Of course."

"They have improved much of late years. La Croix has inherited from some source a second modest competence."

"Ah!" on went the nimble pen in Mr. Sharlaw's hand.

"But," and here Disset, who was also writing, stayed his hand, "Miss La Croix is an heiress."

"Ah!"

"Yes; within the week only she has inherited a fine fortune from her mother's eldest sister, a penitent spinster."

Mr. Sharlaw laid down his pen.

"How will this affect Mr. Crashaw's enterprise?" he asked.

"Mr. Crashaw will tell you that, when he comes."

Again for many moments the two pens wrote busily, then Disset arose and came slowly towards Mr. Sharlaw—as he moved one saw that he was very lame indeed.

"Mr. Sharlaw."

"Well?" Sharlaw dropped his pen.

"During the past three years have I been of any use to you—to the cause?"

"Man alive! what a question! As if you did not *know* how valuable your services have been."

"Then have I earned the right to ask a favour, a change?"

"A change! what change, man?"

"Of work—of scene. I want to go to America."

"*You*, Disset?"

"Yes, I."

"And in what capacity?"

Disset was silent.

"Crashaw, you know, has his own secretary."

"Yes, I know, Passauf; and a very good one, too."

"Well, La Croix—is that your idea?"

"La Croix, if he choose an aid, will name Rene Savorin, or his daughter—perhaps both."

"Well, then, what will you be? Not one of the gardeners?"

"Bah! no."

"What, then? Oh, yes; I see! You will be a—what shall we say?—a *detective* in the interest of the U. C.? Is that it?"

"Plain words are best," said Disset, doggedly. "I would be a spy."

"An ugly word, Disset."

"There's need enough of the office, though. There's ugly work done there. You don't know the worst, perhaps." He turned and limped back to his desk, from which he took an envelope, which he gave to Sharlaw. "Read it," he said.

Sharlaw drew from it a printed slip, evidently cut from a newspaper. For a moment his eyes were riveted to the bit of paper, then a sharp exclamation broke from his lips. "Horrible!" he muttered under his breath, and then, aloud: "Another useless sacrifice, and the work yet to be done!" He got up and began to pace the room, his lips and hands working nervously. Presently he spoke—

"Disset, you are right; we do need—a spy. But your lameness, will it not be a too serious drawback?"

"I'm willing to risk it," said Disset.

"Then call it settled. If you can find and instruct a substitute in your duties, you sail with Crashaw and his party. And now go and bring him to me at once—Crashaw, I mean."

As the newly appointed spy hastened to close his desk, possess himself of his shabby hat, and go limping forth upon his mission, Mr. Sharlaw watched him furtively, holding the while the newspaper clipping closely clutched in one hand, a fact of which he was seemingly unconscious.

When Disset was out of hearing he opened the crumpled paper and read it again, with a nervous tremor shaking his whole body.

It was from New York, and dated some twenty days back. It read as follows:—

"James Johnson (which, of course, is an assumed name) the man condemned upon his own confession for the murder of Jacob Traill, an inoffensive and elderly man, refuses to speak of the affair, although he converses upon most other topics with the few persons who have followed his rather strange case from the beginning. He does not deny that the name James Johnson is a false one, but will give no other. He admits freely the killing of Traill, but refuses to name a cause or provocation. In fact, no one can imagine such a man as the victim giving just cause, or any cause, to an assassin. Clearly it was not murder for robbery. Altogether, the case is a strange one, and the stranger man who will die for this crime will, it is most probable, go out of the world carrying the secret of his own identity and this other more sinister secret with him."

CHAPTER VI.

MOINA AND MADELINE.

"GODMOTHER, look—look quick! Ah! there, she has turned away!"

"What is it, dear?"

"That beautiful creature again, of course."

"Oh, the lovely girl! What a Quixote you are, Madeline. You are as anxious to make the acquaintance of that young lady as if you were a young man, instead of——"

"An old maid."

"Nonsense! Old maids must be at least twenty-four before they can lawfully claim the title, and you——"

"I am approaching that blissful age fast enough, dear godmother. Yes, I admit that I *do* want to know that girl; at least, to speak with her."

"I should think that might be easy enough."

"I'm not so sure; she seems very reserved. I was about to say shy, but that is not the word; shyness implies self-consciousness, and that girl is as natural, as unaffected, as gracefully unconscious of her own grace and beauty, and of the admiring eyes that follow her, as if she were alone with that stately old man, who must be her father, and with this old ocean, which she seems to love, for she gives it more of her notice than she gives to ship, passengers, and crew, always excepting the father, who might be a fine old picture come to life."

The lady lying back in the deck chair, wrapped in her rugs and trifling with some fleecy wools that lay tangled in her lap, making vivid contrast against the sombre hue of her robe and wrappings, smiled up into the face turned toward her, letting her eyes linger lovingly there.

It was a beautiful face, and a youthful one, in spite of its owner's avowed nearness to the mystic line which cuts off the maiden from the realm of spinsterhood. And it was more than this; it was a face whose beauty had been chastened, disciplined, and purified—a fine, firm, courageous face, at once strong and tender, self-contained, and sensitive, helpful and womanly sweet.

At twenty-three Madeline Payne had lived out one lifetime of trial and suffering; had passed through bitterest sorrow; had known the world as a hard task-mistress; had been sinned against, tempted, persecuted; had fought her battles, and conquered—first her enemies, and then herself; and now, chastened, purified, humbled, and strengthened, she stands looking down into the face of her nearest and dearest friend, for blood relative she has not one, and is a happy woman. Knowing the world and humanity; loving its good things, loathing its evil; ready with heart and hand to help its sufferers; to pity the weak, to cheer on the strong; trusting in God, and believing fully, after many fierce battles with her own fiery nature, that all her life has been, and is, "Best for her and for mankind."

As the elder woman looks and smiles, Madeline draws nearer.

"Are you quite comfortable, dear? Let me pull up that rug."

"No, child, I am *very* comfortable, and what a lovely morning! I wish I were a better sailor like you; I feel like a passenger just come on board; the life on deck is so new to me. And you, in a week you know everybody here, of course."

"Not quite—you forget."

"I mean in your way, and in a very good way. Sit down here and tell me about your fellow-passengers."

Madeline seated herself with a smile in her brown eyes, but with a very sober face.

"First," she began, "there is a lady on board who interests *me* more than all the rest; more, even, than does the lovely dark-eyed girl over there. This lady is tall and slender, and rather fragile—not *ill*, you understand, not in the least—only dainty, and, I sometimes fancy, a bit spoiled by a rather domineering young woman who looks after her very sharply, and of whom I have not a very flattering opinion. This very gentle sweet-voiced lady has been shut in her state-room ever since the first day out, and has appeared on deck to-day for the first time. She is dressed in soft black garments, and I dare say she knows how very becoming they are, and her hair, which is very soft, abundant, and wavy, is as white as silver frost-work. She is sitting at this moment in a deck chair, and the red-haired domineering young woman before-mentioned is telling her about the passengers, and, in a moment, will present to her the captain of the ship, which is not a ship, but a very prosaic steamboat.

The lady put out a slender hand and laid a finger lightly upon the lovely lips now parting in a smile of welcome as the captain approached; and in another moment Mrs. Ralston and Captain Hardin were made acquainted, and were exchanging the usual courtesies, while Madeline Payne, standing erect, was looking seaward, and now and then contributing her word to the conversation.

"Captain," she said after a time, "I am growing interested in one of your passengers, and I want some information concerning——"

"Him?"

"Her," Madeline laughed softly. "I mean the beautiful girl who is almost always with the old man?"

"Her father."

"Yes, I had guessed that."

"The lady is a Miss La Croix, booked from London, *via* Liverpool, to New York, like yourself. The old man is a gentleman, and I have found him most interesting, although very reticent. He had favoured me with an introduction to his daughter, but *her* reserve I have not as yet been able to penetrate. Do you know I fancy that there is a romance going on, perhaps I ought to say beginning, under our eyes?"

"Indeed!" Madeline turned a smiling face upon the captain, who had taken a seat besides Mrs. Ralston. "Pray let us into the secret."

"With pleasure. Have you observed that very handsome young man, who is nearly always on deck, seeming to know nobody, yet very affable to all who address a word to him?"

"Alas!" replied Mrs. Ralston, to whom the question seemed

addressed, "I have seen no one, except the stewardess and Miss Payne, until to-day, captain, and nothing except the walls of my state-room, and an occasional glimpse of a big wave."

"I think I know the person," said Miss Payne. "A foreign-looking young man; that is, he looks neither American nor English, and might be either a poet or a musician."

"An actor, perhaps," smiled Mrs. Ralston.

"No, indeed! he is not in the least self-conscious. He does not pose, nor pause for an effect. I see you know who he is, captain."

The captain nodded.

"I have fancied that this youth is casting longing eyes toward Miss La Croix," he said; "in fact, I have seen *her* eyes follow some movement of his more than once, and I fancied this morning that the father noticed something of the same sort, for I saw his eyes follow the young fellow in his promenade, and then turn toward his daughter, with, I thought, a look of warning or mild reproof in them."

"And you think it is a case of mutual admiration, captain?" asked Miss Payne.

"It looks strangely like it."

"Well, now, *I* am going to be confidential. I have let my eyes follow the lady very persistently during the week of my solitude on deck. Why, Mrs. Ralston, only fancy, except for Captain Hardin here, I have only made *one* acquaintance in the proper fashion, and I am indebted to him for that."

"I don't know about the indebtedness," said the captain with a shrug. "How *have* you found Crashaw, Miss Payne? I never quite considered him a ladies' man, although he can find plenty to say among men."

"He has not lacked for words, nor, indeed, for ideas, when in conversation with me," said the young lady. "Mr. Crashaw, Mrs. Ralston, is the matter-of-fact Englishman of whom I told you."

"I remember."

"I am glad you found him interesting, Miss Payne. Crashaw's a good sort of man to know. He's crossed, one way or the other, with me several times, and I've met him in New York and in London. He's a business man, a practical man, through and through; he's lately retired from active business, he tells me, though; iron trade it was. But *your* confidence, Miss Payne——"

She laughed lightly, and for a moment seemed to hesitate.

"Do you believe in antipathies?" she finally asked.

"Yes, heartily. Don't you?"

"A little. Well, captain, I hope you realize that we are gossiping recklessly, and since we have brought up the name of your friend, Mr. Crashaw, I might say unpardonably."

"Not quite so strong as that, Miss Payne. Crashaw's an acquaintance; I can write the names of my *friends* on the palm of my hand But about your antipathy?"

"Oh, it is not *my* antipathy; it's Miss La Croix's."

"Oh!"

"Yes. I have not observed her glances of admiration for the hand-

some young man, though I have observed *him*. But I have seen her shiver—actually shudder, when Mr. Crashaw has chanced to pass very near her ; and once I saw her fling at his back a look, which, if she had *known* the man, I should call of actual *loathing*."

"Why, Madeline!" ejaculated Mrs. Ralston, half laughing, half in amazement, "have you really been driven to this?"

"Oh, I know it's bad form, godmother, but really I don't feel very sorry. Captain Hardin may be trusted, I know ; indeed, he's a partner in my guilt."

The captain made some light response, and then grew thoughtful. "That reminds me," he began, then checked himself suddenly, for not three feet away, Mr. Crashaw stood, having received a nod from Miss Payne. He promptly joined the group.

During the week that followed, Madeline Payne found her list of acquaintances on board the steamer *Manhattan* growing larger by rapid degrees.

First, Captain Hardin presented to Mrs. Ralston and herself the La Croixs, father and daughter, and then, by a little stratagem, easy enough of execution, Mr. Crashaw made it necessary that Miss Payne should present him to the two. This done, it appeared that Crashaw had formed the acquaintance of the good-looking youth, who might, according to Madeline, have been either poet or musician, and soon the group that congregated daily about Mrs. Ralston's adjustable deck-chair, was composed of strange elements, Miles and Moina La Croix, Rufus Crashaw, who, for reasons which seemed mutually understood and mutually satisfactory, enacted the rôle of stranger to both ; Rene Savorin, the handsome youth ; Captain Hardin, and two or three English sightseers, who were coming to our American shores with all their English prejudices and illusions fresh upon them.

It was a not unpleasant party, dissimilar as were the elements which composed it.

Before they separated, upon anchoring in New York harbour, each knew of the other little biographical fragments such as these :—

Mrs. Ralston, a widow, wealthy, childless, and very much attached to Miss Payne, who had been her travelling companion for three years; Mrs. Ralston was returning to New York to live, and her friend Madeline would live with her.

Madeline Payne, an orphan, and an heiress, having chosen Mrs. Ralston for friend and chaperone, would be brought out by her, and looked forward to a winter of pleasure ; she was not a frivolous young woman, but she was alive to all that was charming and pleasant in life, and meant to see society from a foremost place in its ranks. For such place she could well command, because of her beauty and cleverness, her wealth and the social standing, already assured, of her chaperone, and other friends.

Miles La Croix, so said Captain Hardin, was a gentleman *and* an artist, possibly he would open a studio, and devote a portion of his time to his art.

Rufus Crashaw was a man of affairs. He was interested in many

things; notably, just now, in railroads, in Western lands *and* American politics.

Rene Savorin, strange to say, was also an artist, he meant to see life in New York for a while, and, perhaps, make a few pictures; he was not a finished artist, oh, no; he needed instructions. When Mr. La Croix had opened his studio he might perhaps hope for a little help from him.

Between the two girls a genuine liking sprang up, and when alone with Madeline Payne, Moina La Croix was at her best. It was her first ocean voyage, and, oddly enough, she was not sea-sick; every day of the passage was bright, and Moina, in Madeline's company, enjoyed it greatly.

One thing Madeline Payne was quick to note: so long as they conversed of impersonal things, Moina was frank and full of pretty ideas and quaint conceits; but to introduce into the conversation the names of Mr. Crashaw or Rene Savorin, was to bring at once over the girl's fair face a veil of reticence, and in spite of her efforts to seem indifferent, her manner became embarrassed.

But Madeline was too wise to form hasty conclusions, and she did not mention these little changes, even to Mrs. Ralston.

"Do you know," she said one day, when they were sitting together in a cosy nook, away from the others—"do you know, Miss La Croix, I am beginning to feel as if I had made an acquaintance that is too pleasant to drop easily. Do you mean to hide yourself from me when we are once on shore?"

Moina flushed painfully, and for a moment seemed at a loss; then, after a moment she asked quietly,

"Why would I hide myself, Miss Payne?"

Madeline laughed.

"Lest you should be too often bored by my company, perhaps."

Moina La Croix sat for a moment looking seaward with a serious face, and Madeline, always quick to observe, fancied that the look of apprehension, which had been called forth by her former sentence, had given place to one of relief as she uttered the last.

Presently Moina turned and drew close to her side.

"Miss Payne," she began in a grave fashion, peculiar to herself, and very charming, Madeline thought, "I am going to be frank with you, I am a very simple girl, and ignorant of many of the things that you call conventionalities. I have never been in what is called 'society,' and I know very little of it, or its ways. I am not *sure* that I *wish* to know it better. We shall not be society people, papa, and I, not"—with a little note of pride in her voice—"that my father is not fitted for the best of society, the highest places and honours. If you could know my dear father as I know him, as he is known to a few others. How lofty his thoughts and aims and ambitions, how unselfish his motives. How full of love his heart is; love for humanity—for the poor and the suffering, and the oppressed! If you could know the *good* he has done, and will do. My dear father! His heart is so full of the serious things of life—there is no room for mere visiting and dining; for superficial, unmeaning courtesies; sometimes I feel a longing to go more into the gay

world that I know so little; and then I reproach, yes, *hate* myself, for the thought, when I look about me and see everywhere so much sorrow, so much oppression, so many poor, half-starved, half-clad, less than half-paid labourers, working—yes, *working*—that this very society that has tempted me with its allurements, may sleep soft and be beautifully clad. Miss Payne, did you ever see the seamy side of life?"

The girl's cheeks were flushed, and her great dark eyes glowing with the feelings she had roused within herself, and Madeline, seated close beside her, was watching her face with quiet interest and the utmost gravity.

"If you mean," she said, with gentle frankness, "have I ever known trouble, sorrow; I have indeed."

"Pardon me! It was a foolish question. I meant, have you known poverty?"

Madeline smiled.

"Not quite that," she said. "But I have been, for a little time, quite penniless, except for the generosity of friends."

"Oh, that is a small ill! I mean, do you know, actually *know*, from observation, from seeing and hearing, and *sharing* it, what it is to work and starve at the same time? Ah! you have never seen the poor of London!"

"Pardon me," said Madeline, gently, "I *have* seen the poor of London, and of Paris, of Rome, and of New York."

"Seen them—*how?*"

"I have an inquiring disposition," Madeline was smiling indulgently, "and my friend, Mrs. Ralston, is very charitable. Then, at times, in seeking out individuals in whom we have become interested, we have been brought into contact with whole classes. Ah, the world will always have its poor, I doubt not. Did you ever think, Miss La Croix, that if it were not for the unworthy poor, the idle, the vicious, the dishonest, the deserving poor would find all their ills lightened? And yet there are worse evils than poverty in this world of ours."

"Oh, yes!"—Moina's voice had a note of sarcasm in it—"for you and me who are not exactly *poor;* but for the poor girls who work from early dawn until late night, for the mothers who support their little ones with fingers that tremble and eyes that ache, with frames weak for lack of food that will nourish the toiling body and brains! Oh, how many such there are! Go, ask *them*, Miss Payne, if there is anything worse than such pinching poverty as theirs!"

Madeline's smile was very gentle, and she put out her hand and touched Moina's, which lay so near her own.

"If you asked some of those toiling girls," she said, slowly, "they might, probably would, say no. If you asked those mothers, some of them, I fear, would say, out of a wisdom born of sad experience, that poverty, hard as it is to bear, is *not* the world's worst evil."

Moina sighed and shuddered, then drew herself erect beside her companion. "*I* have been among those toiling ones," she said, "I wanted to *know* for myself. I think I shall never outlive the horror of it. The shock it was to learn that so near one, breathing the

same air, were young girls like myself, and older women, mothers, and grandmothers, wearing out their lives just for the privilege of *living!* And such living! Huddled together in close little garret rooms. Yes, in *one* little room, living upon a dry loaf, drinking tainted water, or poisonous cheap tea by way of luxury! Dressed in worn and often tattered clothing, and no light, *no* beauty, no *sunshine* even in their monotonous lives! Once I saw an old woman who had just been released from prison, and I asked her what her life had been behind those barred doors. "It was a very good life," she said "compared with the life I used to live. I had tried to live honestly by sewing, but I was not strong and couldn't work fast. I had better food, better bed, and lighter work in prison than I could earn out of it. I *knew* that I would, and I *stole* to get there."

"My dear, you are a little enthusiast," said Madeline, admiringly. "And what a telling point that little story would make in a socialistic speech. I begin to suspect you. Come, honestly now, are not you a bit of a socialist yourself?" Madeline had uttered her bantering speech lightly and simply to arrest the enthusiasm which she saw glowing upon the lovely face beside her, and lead the girl back to the original and more personal topic; but she was not prepared for the effect of her lightly uttered words.

Moina's face, already flushing and glowing, grew yet more vivid, and then paled utterly. She withdrew her hand with a quick startled gesture, and half rose, her eyes involuntarily seeking the place where her father sat in conversation with Mrs. Ralston and Captain Hardin.

"Pardon me." It was an icily cool voice at her elbow. "Permit me." Moina sank back into her seat and put out her hand to take from Mr. Crashaw the handkerchief that had fluttered from her lap to the deck.

"Were you about to join your father, Miss La Croix? If so——"

"Thank you." Moina's voice was quite calm now, and her eyes met his without flinching. "I have no such intention at present, Mr. Crashaw."

As Crashaw turned away, Madeline wondered inwardly what could be the meaning of that quick look which flashed between them.

CHAPTER VII.

MAY 12TH.

If there is in all the world any object more hideous, more hopeless than a coffin, it is a cell, a prison cell wherein all hope is abandoned.

If the coffin is empty, the cell is occupied. If the coffin is tenanted, it is only the resting-place for a piece of pulseless clay; it holds no heart-break, no despair, no horror of the hours to come.

But the cell of the man who soon, perhaps in an hour, perhaps to-morrow, but *soon* and certainly, will bid good-bye to the world, and, at a given moment, go out into space. Oh, the dreariness of that!

"On the twelfth of May, between the hours of ten and two of the clock, the sentence of death will be executed upon the condemned."

These were the words that repeated themselves over and over in the ears of a pale prisoner, the sole occupant of a condemned cell on the twelfth of May and "at ten of the clock."

He was sitting upon the side of his narrow iron bed, looking straight before him, not at the bare wall and grated door, but through and beyond them, seeing with that inward vision that neither bolts, nor bars, nor prison walls, can hold in check—what?

His clasped hands hung loosely between his knees, upon which his elbows rested, and, while his body was inclined forward, his head was lifted and thrown slightly back. The smooth-shaven face was a youthful one, not handsome, but firm in its lines, refined in its expression; not at all the face of the typical assassin. There was no hardness there, no traces of a vicious life of debauchery. The forehead was broad and white, the eyes looked straightforward and with no hint of fear in them. The loosely-clasped hands were white, soft, and well cared for; manifestly the hands of a gentleman. The mouth was fine, and when it relaxed in a smile, the otherwise plain face must have seemed almost handsome. But no smile softened that face as he sat there looking into space and facing his last moments; only grim resolve and patient endurance spoke in lips and eyes.

And this man, who could not have seen more than twenty-four or five years of life, was a murderer!

Not a murderer condemned upon evidence, circumstantial or other, but a murderer *by his own confession!*

And what a murder!

The victim, a man of sixty, a quiet unobtrusive citizen, beloved by his own little circle of friends, and scarcely known beyond it.

And the cause—the provocation? Ah, there was the mystery. Jacob Traill had emerged from the church, where, every Sunday evening for many years, he had bowed his head in humble sincere worship. On this evening he came forth alone; before him, behind him, all about him, by families, in couples, singly, other worshippers came; and, close behind him, another solitary figure walked, always close behind him, until, half a dozen blocks from the church, the crowd became scattered, and a row of trees stretching out beyond, threw deep shadows, and swallowed up the flitting figures moving this way and that.

Then, suddenly, a young man leaning over a cottage gate, and holding, in the friendly shadow, the hand of a fair companion about to enter, saw, across the way, a slow moving form, and another that moved more swiftly, as if in pursuit, seem for a moment to blend and become one struggling mass. Then, instantly almost, a sharp report rang out, breaking the Sabbath-stillness of the quiet refined quarter.

The fair hand was dropped, and the youth was across the street, bending above the slain, and with a strong clutch upon the arm of the slayer, while his voice rang out in that always thrilling cry of "*Murder, murder, murder!*"

Afterward, it appeared that the pair were well matched, and that

the assassin made a momentary struggle, but that was all. The second man upon the scene, a man with a cool head and well developed muscles, easily wrested the smoking pistol from his grasp, and that was the end of resistance.

The prisoner pleaded guilty, but refused to give his name or his motive. He was guilty, that was enough.

And now the day of expiation had come. Between the hours of ten and two he was to die, and it had struck ten already.

"Four more hours to wait," the prisoner muttered wearily, and then moved slightly, lifted his head, and, at once, listlessly let it fall again.

The door of his cell was opening slowly, and a man, young like himself, but tall, erect, and full of glowing health and vigour, entered and paused near the door, standing silently there until it had closed behind him and he had heard the key turned in the lock without. Then he seated himself with a quick movement upon the cot beside the prisoner.

"Well!" he said, and the single syllable of interrogation was, as he uttered it, at once a greeting and an assurance of sympathy.

The condemned lifted his head.

"You!" he said, sitting erect, and turning toward the new comer. "I thought it was ——, the chaplain."

"No, I prevailed with them once more."

The prisoner's hopeless eyes scanned his face almost wistfully.

"You seem to me a man born to prevail," he said, slowly. "I wish—" he checked his speech, but did not withdraw his gaze.

"I have not prevailed with *you*," said the visitor, in a low tone. "Have you thought it all over? Is there no way open to you? No word that you can utter? No sign that you may give; and that I may understand?"

The prisoner arose, and stood erect before him.

"Is it possible?" he said. "Do you still believe in me?" He turned away his face for a moment, then walked two or three times to and fro across the narrow cell. "If you persist in this," he said, at last, huskily, "you will have me unmanned at the last moment. I beg of you, *don't* do that."

"I won't," getting up, and assuming a matter of fact tone. "I want to do you good, not ill." Then he came a step nearer. "Tell me," he said, "for the last time I ask you. Is there *no* wish unfulfilled, no message, no word? can I do nothing to throw a ray of light, a gleam of comfort, upon these last hours of yours?"

The prisoner turned upon him suddenly.

"Tell *me*," he said, with low-toned vehemence, "*why* do you come to me like this? Who are you, and what end will this interest of yours serve?"

"Sit down," said the visitor, himself taking the one chair, and turning it so that he faced the cot when seated. "I'm going to answer you fully, who am I. The sheriff introduced me correctly. I am Roger Drexel, a bachelor, admitted to the bar, but without an office or legal practice. Of independent fortune, which may account for this state of affairs; without parents, or any close family ties, which, in

part, accounts for my wandering propensities, for I have travelled much; something of a student too, and seldom without an object in my journeyings. Nature has endowed me with a fondness and a faculty for diving under the surface in search of the hidden meanings which underlie most of the serious things of life. I look always for the pearl in the oyster. *Why* do I come to you as I have?" He leaned toward the other, who was now sitting near him, upon the cot. "Because I must—because," with a slight gesture, and holding the eye of the prisoner with his own, "because we are *brothers*."

"What!" the prisoner lifted one hand quickly, and as quickly let it fall again, "how—far—?" he articulated.

"Not far, only across the threshold. But far enough to learn something of how things are done above us, beyond us, how the great family is growing, and how—" he paused, for the prisoner had made a gesture entreating him to silence.

"Say no more," he whispered. "It can do no good! Why have you revealed yourself *now?*"

"I will tell you." Roger Drexel arose, and stood over the condemned, who was now trembling violently, and very pale. "I will tell you why. It is because I see in you one of a long list of martyrs—men sacrificed at the bidding of commanders safe and high. Horrible powers for good or evil. And working through the hearts and hands; yes, and the *lives* of our brethren." His strong hand fell heavily upon the shoulder of the man before him—heavily, but not ungently. "Look into my eyes, comrade, and tell me, when you took the first step, with open eyes, so you thought, with heart thrilling with lofty sentiments and hand outstretched, ready to lend itself to noble deeds, did you recognize, *anywhere*, the hand of iron under the velvet? Looking up 'the shining ladder;' lifting your face 'toward the stars,' was there anything sinister in their gleam? *anything* that was the faintest prophecy or foreshadowing of—this?" He swept the narrow cell with a glance and a gesture, and the poor prisoner understood.

"No," he groaned, and then he did lift his head. "No, there was nothing—*nothing!*"

"And yet," Roger Drexel's voice sank, and his low tone cut its way to his hearer's ears, keen and bitter, and very stern, "the captains, the commanders of the nineties, the council, all saw; *all* see, to-day, the first step and the last. *They know* that, grand and noble, inspiring and chivalrous, as is the first war cry, the first step, fair and white as is the first portal, when we have entered there is no going back. *They* see the end from the beginning, and yet——"

"Hush!" the condemned man sprang up, and put out an imploring hand. "Hush, my kind friend. What is it you are saying? Don't you know?"

"One more word. Yes, I *know*. I know, although I have only trod the outer portal—and you—but no matter. I *know* the enormity of my offence. But," and here his voice became ineffably gentle, and his fine eye as tender as a loving woman's. "But, comrade, I have watched you well, and I now beseech you not to break one oath, not to violate one obligation; but to *hear* me, and to trust me. If what I am about to say is *true*, you need make me no reply. But, if I am

in error, I beg of you make it known to me. You can do *that* safely—honourably. I wish to serve you. Don't you see what that implies?"

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes, then the condemned man dropped once more upon the cot, and buried his face in his hands.

"May I go on?" said Roger Drexel.

From between the hands that concealed the face now impassioned, came a murmur of assent. And while the bowed head was half averted, Drexel carefully consulted his watch, opening and closing it cautiously that the other might not hear.

Already it was eleven o'clock.

Suddenly the hands dropped from before the face that had been forced back into its accustomed calm, but not quite into its former apathy, as the prisoner looked up.

"One thing I will say," he said, firmly, "I have longed to say it to you before, and now I will, I could not quite bear to go out into the unknown without once lifting my head and letting the last spark of manhood left to me have its way for just once. I could not, I think, even if you had not revealed yourself, and now," he caught his breath sharply, and suddenly lifted his right hand, holding it aloft and throwing back his head as he spoke. "As if I were already in the presence of that God whom I am so soon to face, I swear to you that no thought of anger, or hatred, or revenge, no hope of gain, no desire to inflict suffering animated the brain that directed or the hand that struck that hideous blow. Already while that poor victim yet struggled at my feet, I was to myself and to all the world as it concerned or affected me, a dead man, *a suicide*. When all is over to-day I shall not have been executed, I shall not have even that doubtful honour. I am a suicide, a murderer, of course, a murderer *in intent*, of more than my one poor victim. In God's name do not call me a martyr, and so perhaps help to make other assassins! I am an assassin, of course, but *a suicide* first."

He was silent a moment and then his chin again dropped upon his breast.

"I cannot say more than this of myself," he added, in a tone of pathetic apology. "Do not ask again, I beg, who I am or was—and *what* I was, matters little now. I was a man once with a home and a future. I was loved, and I——*Oh, my God!*"

His hands went up in a despairing gesture. He writhed to his feet and then flung himself face downward upon the prison cot, and tears, the bitterest that man ever shed, and sobs that shook him woefully, and were a torture to his listener, broke up for the first time, the stolid calm of his demeanour.

Writhing and torn by strong emotion he lay there prone upon his face, and Roger Drexel, pale, but with set lips and clenched fingers, paced the little cell and waited for the storm to pass.

The turnkey came to the door and looked in through the iron grating, and then the chaplain showed in the doorway a gentle anxious face, but Drexel gave to the one only a glance, and waved him away with a gesture. To the other he said, "Not now, I must not lose this chance, leave us, I will call you—in time."

The face of the chaplain was very anxious when he again presented himself, but again Drexel whispered, "Not yet."

"It is almost one o'clock," the good man whispered.

There was a sudden movement of the form which for some moments had been lying still upon the cot and breathing heavily, but it was not until after the face of the chaplain was withdrawn, that the prisoner lifted his head, and then sat up.

"So," he said, quite calmly, "it is nearly over." For a moment his gaze wandered slowly all about the cell, then it fastened itself upon Roger Drexel.

"After all," he said, with a shadowy smile, "I *do* thank you, I *am* indebted to you. Great heaven! what a forlorn friendless wretch I would have been but for you. I am indebted to you I dare say for all of the comforts permitted to me."

"No."

"I think it *must* be so. Why have you done this?"

Drexel drew close to him.

"Because I saw in you the prophecy of what my fate might have been but for the sober thoughts, the timely warning, you have brought to me. Because I began as *you* no doubt began, an enthusiast. And there are others, many others, like us, you and I—all over the world being first led, then driven, they know not whither. Let me tell you what I am going to do—if you do not forbid it, even if you *do*, perhaps."

"What is it?"

"You have refused to reveal you name, your home, your nationality even. We do not know your rank, nor if you leave friends. I ask you nothing, and so ask nothing of me. I am going to unravel the mystery you bequeath me, and if I find at the end that I can set at rest heartrending uncertainty, and not make sad hearts sadder, I am going to make your story known, and so emancipate myself while I vindicate you, for I say again you are only what I might have been—*must* have been, perhaps, but for you. I have studied you long and well, my poor comrade; and if I have read your story aright I cannot but know what it is that you have endured, and how light, how easy in comparison, this that is to come will be."

Into the face of the prisoner came a woeful pallor, and the anguish that looked out of his eyes was awful to see.

"Oh!" he moaned, "you don't know even yet. You cannot fathom it! *The worst.*"

"Pardon me," Drexel dropped down beside him and again put a hand upon his shoulder, "I think I do."

"You think—you do!"

Drexel bent his head and put his lips to the prisoner's ear—

"Your sacrifice has been in vain," he whispered, "IT WAS THE WRONG MAN."

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE TRAGEDY.

DINNER waited in the pretty home, pretty without and within, where Olive Girard reigned a happy mistress. Happy now, although for a few dreary years she had been a sad one, and the pretty villa had been a house of gloom. For Olive Girard and her husband Philip, two noble souls, worthy of the best that this world could give, had been made the playthings of Fate, when that uncertain vixen was in an adverse mood; and the sins of others had been visited upon their innocent heads.

Mr. and Mrs. Girard were not, strictly speaking, in "Society," not because they could not be, but because they would not bow at the shrine, come and go, feast and be feasted, at the gay Dame's behests.

Once they had been looked upon as society's favoured and brightest ornaments, and then society, in league with fate, turned toward them a very cold shoulder—not quite her back, for the black wave that swept from them all their other good things, left them their purses, well filled—and closed her doors, *almost* in their faces. Fate had long since relented, and society signified her more than willingness to welcome them back, but they had conquered the one and ceased to care for the other. They had learned their lesson, and they knew how to get the best out of the years that life had left to them.

Nevertheless they were not without their friends, and a very select little coterie it was that sometimes gathered in the Girard drawing-rooms, culled from among society's best, and every member tried and not found wanting.

Society had not contributed, however, to the dinner of to-day, at least not as yet, for there were but four people in the little rear drawing-room: its master and mistress, Doctor Clarence Vaughan, who was not at present of society, being still a mourner for his wife, Clair, who had been dead nearly two years, and little Philip, usually called Phil, Doctor Vaughan's son and heir, aged five.

Over the mantel hung a picture of the boy's mother, who had been the younger and only sister of Olive Girard, and the resemblance between mother and child was almost startling.

The boy was coming and going between his aunt's chair and the big window that fronted the street, and presently his uncle put out a hand to him.

"Come here, little Phil Trotter; what do you see at that window?"

"Drex," said the boy, hurrying past the detaining hand. "I lookin' for Drex."

"Oh, Drexel?" smiled Girard. "Well, I hope you may see him soon, and so does cook, I daresay."

Doctor Vaughan looked up from the paper in his hand, and the eyes of the two men met.

"Roger is badly cut up," said the doctor. "I never saw him so unnerved."

"Careful." It was the low voice of Mrs. Girard, and her eyes were turned for one moment towards the child at the window.

"He comin'!" Little Phil was making sturdy efforts to drop his baby dialect and talk like his elders; but some of his letters and syllables usually slipped away from him, except in his more deliberate moments; and there was nothing deliberate in the manner in which he now dashed unhindered from the room, to re-enter it triumphantly a moment later perched upon Roger Drexel's shoulder.

The greetings were quiet, and more earnest glances were exchanged; and then little Phil was consigned to his nurse, and his four elders went together to the dining-room.

It was a very quiet dinner. While the well-served courses came and went, the talk was subdued, Drexel taking the smallest part, and Mrs. Girard and Doctor Vaughan the largest part, in the conversation.

Roger Drexel was noted in society as the life of its dainty revels, but to-day he was not only grave—for this, as they all knew, there was sufficient reason—but he was absent and abstracted as well.

Doctor Vaughan, who sat opposite him, noted this with some wonder.

Presently Drexel roused himself with an evident effort, and turned his face towards the hostess.

"I beg your pardon, really, Mrs. Girard, will you be so good as to repeat your last remark? I believe it was addressed to me?"

Olive smiled indulgently.

"It *was* addressed to you, Mr. Drexel, and it was to this effect: 'I have a letter from Miss Payne, Madeline; she will be in New York in a few days.'"

A quiet smile was playing about the corners of Doctor Vaughan's mouth; a look of content was in his eyes as they rested upon Roger Drexel, and no one saw the smile fade or the look of content give place to one of pain as the handsome young man opposite put down the morsel upon his fork untasted, and turned a brightening face upon host and hostess in turn.

"Is that true? Is she really coming?" Actually his face was flushing with pleasure, and his eyes were beaming; only Doctor Vaughan had seen his first start of glad surprise. "I'm *very* glad to hear it. Does she come to stay?"

"Yes, for the present. Of course, Mrs. Ralston comes with her."

"And they will reside in the City?" persisted Drexel.

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Ralston had instructed Mr. Lord some time since to find her a suitable home. I think she wanted to be rather gay this winter, for Madeline's sake. But Philip tells me that Mr. Lord has other ideas."

"Eh?" Drexel turned quickly upon his host. "How is that, Philip?"

"You see, Mr. Lord has decided not to give up that monster house of his, but to have some of its rooms re-furnished; and he wants Mrs. Ralston to enter in and take possession. He only asks to be allowed his corner by the fireside and his occasional 'fat men's dinner,' as Madeline used to call them. You know Mrs. Ralston is a cousin of Lord's, or of his late wife's, and I suppose the old fellow is not blind to the social advantages of having such a girl as Madeline in that castle of his."

"Probably not." Already Drexel seemed in danger of lapsing back into his former state of absent-mindedness, and Dr. Vaughan, very grave now, and a trifle pale, but perfectly calm, took up the ball of conversation.

"Has Mrs. Ralston given her decision, then?"

"By no means," replied Mrs. Girard. "It remains undecided until they have arrived. I fancy it will be Miss Payne who will give the decisive vote."

"Eh?" Again Roger Drexel had started visibly, and was taking new interest in the conversation, which continued for some moments to deal chiefly with Madeline Payne, the possible day and hour of her arrival, and her plans for the future, so far as they were known or might be guessed by such old and tried friends as were the Girards and Dr. Vaughan.

At last the dessert was before them, and the servants were dismissed; then for a few moments a strange constraint fell upon them.

Through the window opposite, Olive Girard could look across and down the stately street until her eyes rested upon the very spot where kindly old Jacob Traill had given up his life.

It was her husband, Philip, who had been second upon the scene, and who had wrested from the hand of the murderer the weapon of death. It was his call that had brought to his side Dr. Vaughan and Roger Drexel, both of whom had been guests in Olive's dainty drawing-room on that unlucky night.

Jacob Traill was a neighbour, and well known to Dr. Vaughan and Girard. They had followed his body to the grave with sincerest sorrow, and in the light of after events had come to view the attitude of his murderer with growing interest and a strange sort of pity.

And to day was the twelfth of May. And, as each one knew, the condemned and his victim were now before the same tribunal. The slayer of Jacob Traill had expiated his crime "between the hours of ten and two," and Roger Drexel had been with him in his last hours.

Something in the face, the bearing, and, more than either, the conduct of this murderer, had interested the three men, each in his own way, and for his own reasons, a philanthropist.

Philip Girard had a tender charity toward all erring and repentant ones, and a strong belief in the efficacy of true repentance. And the awful anguish in the eyes of that slayer of old age, even while he stood red-handed above his victim, was, he said, a thing never to be forgotten.

"There's some horrible mystery about that man," he had said to his two friends, when later on the night of the murder they came together into Drexel's bachelor rooms to talk over the strange event. "It's no common murder, and the man is no common assassin."

And to this opinion he still held, although he had, as yet, no grounds other than these first impressions.

Dr. Vaughan's interest in the prisoner was based upon a mixture of reasons, scientific and other. He shared in his friend's belief that there was "a mystery," and that the murder and the murderer were not of the commoner sort. But Dr. Vaughan was a most reasonable being; he liked to keep his thoughts and feelings healthily and actively alert and disentangled from mysteries. Perhaps one of his strongest reasons for

following up this hopeless case had been the interest that he saw growing in the mind of Roger Drexel. He believed in Drexel, and admired him greatly. Drexel, without seeming to recognize the fact, was a man of impressions and intuitions ; and Dr. Clarence Vaughan, while not an impressionist, believed in impressions. He believed that Drexel was strongly possessed of that mysterious power which, in some fortunate beings, forestalls judgment, and runs ahead of experience. He had observed that Drexel's opinions were usually sound, and that his impressions were almost invariably verified by time and circumstances, and he saw with growing interest, and some wonder, that Roger Drexel was becoming absorbed by this strange affair. And this was not all : at first Drexel had talked freely about the murder and the possibilities connected with it ; but, after a time, while his interest increased, his opinions and theories underwent various modifications, until he ceased to express the one, or to advance or improve upon the other, and, at last, grew strangely, unusually silent upon the subject ; but all the while he was a constant visitor at the prison, and saw more of the prisoner than anyone else outside the walls.

It had become a habit with Drexel to dine upon some day of each week with his friends at the villa, and gradually the day had been fixed.

On the morning of this twelfth of May Drexel had encountered Philip Girard upon the street, and had said to him with a grave face—

"I shall dine with you to-day, I suppose, as usual, unless—do you have any one else ?"

"No. Just ourselves to-day ; and Olive has been wondering if you would be too much, or too seriously, occupied."

"I think I shall be only too glad to come to you after such a dreary scene. But I feared, or thought, there might be others."

"No ; oh, no. Not to-day ! Olive, indeed *all* of us feel almost as if we had some deep personal interest in this day's tragedy."

"Yes." Drexel moved on apace.

"Well, I will see the end of it ; if it *is* the end, and then—well, until to-night *nothing*."

And now it was over, and the four friends were together around Olive's dainty table. It had been a habit with her not to leave them when there were no other more formal guests, and so to-night they sat as usual, save for the unwonted silence and gravity.

It was Drexel who spoke at last, turning as he did so to Philip Girard.

"Well—it is over," he said, and then, in a gentler tone—"and bravely over."

"Ah !" it was Olive who sighed out this syllable ; the two men only turned attentive eyes upon him.

"He was firm to the last. He has taken his secret with him."

"Even his name ?" ejaculated Olive.

"That, most of all, he guarded."

"And he left no messages ? no requests ?"

"Messages—none. He made one request."

"Ah !" this time it was Doctor Vaughan.

"Almost at the last moment," went on Drexel, "he asked me, if I, or either of us, individually or collectively, had procured for him the services of the lawyers who had defended him so ably."

"We—really," began Girard.

"The question *was* a surprise," said Drexel. "Fortunately I was able to answer it. I assured him that *I* had no hand in it; and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, neither of you had."

"Right."

"Quite right."

"I think my answer settled some doubtful point for him. I think it helped him to a more certain knowledge of the instigators of his defence. When he had received my assurance, he asked me to say to the lawyers that he thanked *them* for their efforts in his behalf."

"To the lawyers?"

Drexel nodded. And the other two men exchanged glances.

Olive Girard, trifling with the dainties before her, saw the glance, and was thoughtful a moment, then she addressed Drexel,

"Somehow we have all felt an interest in this matter, for no better reason, on my part, perhaps, than that its beginning came so near to us. What most interests me *now* is to know how he died."

"Calmly—bravely—with closed lips."

Another moment of silence, and then Olive pushed back her chair. "I am going up to Phil," she said. "He will not be down to-night, and I leave you, gentlemen, to your own devices."

Drexel was up and at the door in a moment, holding back the heavy draperies, and bowing low as she went out.

As he resumed his seat, Girard and Doctor Vaughan were again exchanging glances; they had both recognized the delicacy of her withdrawal, and it was admissible to each.

"If Mrs. Girard left us because she fancied I would be more communicative in her absence," began Drexel, "I am sorry. There is nothing to tell that she might not have heard."

"It was not altogether that, I think," said her husband gravely. "Olive can be brave enough at need. But she has no fondness for unpleasant details, and she knew, I dare say, that Vaughan and I were quite ready to open our battery of inquiry. Drexel, you have followed this poor fellow to the end of the world with an interest that has been a cause of wonder to both of us. Are you able to tell us why?"

Drexel helped himself to a glass of wine.

"I think you must admit that it has been a strange case throughout," he said. "The victim's a man so unoffending that I don't believe in all the universe another could be found who would shed his blood. The slayer, a man so reserved, so calm, so evidently *not* a common criminal, or a criminal of *any* sort. His ready admission of guilt. His refusal to defend himself, or to take advantage of the thousand and one 'extenuating circumstances' that such legal advisers as his could have brought to the defence! When before, in all the history of crime, has a prisoner refused to accept *insanity* as a defence, a plea?"

"He was the sanest man I ever examined," said Doctor Vaughan. "The coolest, the most quietly determined!"

"Undoubtedly. What was *your* final conclusion concerning him?"

"First," said the doctor, slowly, there was, must have been, a strong motive ——"

"Say pressure," interrupted Drexel, dryly.

"Well, perhaps that *is* the word; we will say pressure. And the idea once fixed in his mind, he practically made an end of everything, so far as himself was concerned. I believe that from the moment when he decided to do the deed, he put all thought of his own personality out of his mind. He had no more interest in himself, or in his life; he no longer had a future. From the moment when he contemplated murder, he also contemplated—suicide. If he had escaped arrest, he would have been found dead, somehow, somewhere, the next morning."

Drexel nodded.

"But his motive," urged Philip Girard. "To shoot that simple, honest, kindly old man, a man who would have forgiven him with his dying breath. Do you know I have learned a queer thing, one that has only come out since his death. Traill was a socialist."

"What!" Drexel turned upon him quickly; "Traill—a socialist!"

"Yes. Not a rabid one, you may be sure, and not a very enthusiastic worker. He was just the good sympathetic sort of a man who would go into such a demonstration seeing only the helpful or the pathetic side, and then draw back and condemn himself rather than the others, if he found his meat too strong. He was a very mild form of socialist, be sure; would they all were like him."

"Amen," said the doctor. "But that does not help on our questions. Drexel, come, have you the vaguest idea—or hint to give us? Have you even been able to hazard a guess?"

"Yes."

Both his listeners started.

"I will tell you," he went on, "but it must not be repeated. I *know* the truth, or a part of it—about that." He drew his chair nearer them, and lowered his voice.

"Jacob Traill was sacrificed. He was *the wrong man*."

"What!"

"The wrong man! Good heavens! Who, then, was the right man?"

Drexel drew from his pocket a small packet, like a thin bundle of letters, and from it drew two photographs. One of them he put into the doctor's hand.

"It is poor Traill," said Dr. Vaughan.

In silence Drexel held out the other.

The doctor took it, uttered a sharp exclamation, and let the second card fall to the floor.

"Understand," said Drexel, quietly, "this was not a confession: it was a discovery; and he did not indicate even by a sign this person," he was bending to pick up the fallen picture. "But," as he laid the two side by side upon the table, "you see the resemblance."

Girard bent over the two pictures.

"Merciful powers," he said, "it's Elias Lord, and *what* a resemblance; and yet two more widely different men could not be found. But, again, the motive? Supposing it to be Lord that he meant to kill?"

"That," said Drexel, "is the secret that is buried to-day in the grave of a nameless unknown murderer."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

MRS. RALSTON did not take a house as she had at first intended. For many years Mr. Lord, the millionaire banker and manufacturer, had been her staunch friend and adviser, had cared for her property and materially increased it, and had in many ways proved himself a true friend, one who counted no pains taken in her service. In the face of his urgent appeal, Mrs. Ralston could only turn to Madeline, and Madeline knowing well how hard it would be for Mrs. Ralston to condemn her old friend to a cheerless winter fireside, treated the problem as a very trifling one, and said gaily—

"Why, godmother mine, you would not rest in your bed if you were to refuse Mr. Lord. Poor man, it isn't just what we expected, to be sure. Mr. Lord's big mansion is a wide contrast to the cosy wee house, 'as near to Olive's as possible,' that we have planned for so long. But it's a splendid abode, and we will try to live up to it. *You* can be a very stately dowager if you 'make an effort,' and I will be the Mrs. Cheek to urge you on. As for me, I suppose that house will help me to carry off a few diamonds and two or three more of those deadly expensive London gowns. *Sincerely*, dear Mrs. Ralston, you *can't* really refuse your good friend, and 'where thou goest,' you know."

And so Mrs. Ralston accepted the chatelaineship of Mr. Lord's splendid mansion, and her conscience acquitted her. The late Mrs. Lord had been her own cousin, and a sister in nearness and affection. Already she knew the house and felt at home in it, and soon all was adjusted; and Madeline Payne, after five or six years of wandering, broken only by some months of art study abroad and two or three visits to New York, always with her friend and godmother, as she had lovingly named Mrs. Ralston, was at last at home in the good city, thoroughly at home with her own apartments, her own maid, and her own horses and groom.

At home at last. Rich, care-free, beautiful, talented, and, best of all, surrounded as she soon was by time-serving worshippers, summer friends, with her few tried and true friends near at hand: the friends of her adversity, of her times of trial; the friends whom she loved—oh, very dearly.

One cloud only had cast its shadow over her otherwise happy home-coming: Claire Keith—bonnie Claire, from whom she had parted two years ago, was not among the welcoming group that awaited her. For more than a year Claire had slept in quiet Greenwood, and her husband and little son had found a home with Olive

and Philip. As Claire Keith, Madeline had loved the girl well; and she had loved her even better when, as the wife of Doctor Clarence Vaughan and the happy mother of little Phil, she had kissed her good-bye and sailed away for the last time. Madeline and Mrs. Ralston had mourned her sincerely, and they mourned her still. But Claire, who had lived so bravely, died bravely, too; looking behind the veil with a bright hope, and leaving for her absent dear ones words of faith, and courage, and cheer. There must be no crape-laden mourning for *her*, only the honest grief of hearts that loved her, and for the rest bright flowers and the pleasantest memories.

And so Madeline, when for the first time she visited Claire's grave at Greenwood, with only Mrs. Ralston, and Olive, and little Phil, took with her rarest roses and strewed them there above the bed of her who had lived so well and fallen asleep so sweetly.

"Little Phil!" said Olive, softly caressing the boy's dark curls, "if you had been a girl, you would not have been Phillippe, but Madeline—she"—turning her eyes towards Madeline, "had planned it so."

And Madeline kissed little Phil, and cried softly.

Mr. Lord had been from the first a staunch admirer of Madeline. For Mrs. Ralston he felt a warm affection; she held in his heart a sister's place. But it is certain that he felt great satisfaction in having Madeline under his roof. He had no thought of playing the venerable lover, as all who really knew the man felt assured when once they had seen the two together, and as Madeline knew better than anyone else; and for this reason she openly indulged her honest liking for the staunch and old-fashioned old gentleman, and would-be wooers found in him a formidable rival.

Before they had been a month domiciled under Mr. Lord's roof, Madeline Payne and the elderly master of the house had become excellent comrades. They understood each other very well indeed, and Mr. Lord came freely and naturally to the girl with many things, pleasant, vexatious, puzzling, or otherwise, that he would never have dreamed of unfolding for the benefit of Mrs. Ralston. And in Madeline he found always an appreciative, interested, sympathetic listener, and not seldom a helper and adviser as well.

On her part, Madeline went to Mr. Lord for help of many kinds. He told her about people, and put them before her in a clear and unconventional light. He gave her the benefit of his views and theories, and even unravelled for her various political problems, national and local. For Madeline was a reader, a student, a constant seeker after new truths and old.

The library in Mr. Lord's mansion was a spacious room, well lighted and splendidly equipped as a library. It had always been the especial haunt of the master of the house, and was seldom approached except when in search of its presiding genius by Mrs. Lord in her day, or by Mrs. Ralston in hers. Madeline, however, had found the cool and stately room greatly to her liking, and when she became assured that it pleased Mr. Lord to find her there when he came in for his hour or two before dinner, she indulged her preference unhesitatingly.

It was early on a sultry June afternoon, and she was sitting near a

shaded window, slowly wielding a big Japanese fan and reading in a leisurely fashion a novel by a new and much-written-of American author, when Mr. Lord came in quite hurriedly and flung himself into his accustomed seat without seeming to see her at her remote shaded window. A moment he fanned himself violently with a newspaper caught up from a table at his elbow, and then while she sat smiling her amusement at his non-observance, he suddenly drew from a pocket a crumpled letter, smoothed it out upon his knee, and adjusting his *pince nez* with an air of wrathful fierceness, bent over it wrinkling his brows, smoothing it afresh and evidently deciphering some portions of it with much difficulty.

"Con*found* their impudence!"

A little ripple of laughter followed this explosion, and Madeline came hastily forward.

"Pardon me, Mr. Lord. I had no idea of overhearing a soliloquy, I assure you. I was amused that you did not see me, and simply waited, like a good little girl, to be seen and spoken to. I will go now."

"Before I repeat my soliloquy? No, Miss Payne. If you go, I *may* repeat it. I'm almost an irresponsible being. Stay and see that I don't violate any more of the proprieties. Sit down again. I'm not sure that I shan't need your sage advice." Then, in a stage whisper, while his brow cleared at sight of her piquant smiling face, "Can you keep a secret?"

"Only try me," she answered, in the same jesting tone.

"Well, I will. Don't flinch, miss; it's a very shocking thing to happen to me at my time of life: I have received an anonymous letter."

"You!" Madeline became suddenly serious. Something almost like indignation shone in her eyes.

"Yes, *I;* even I. If I asked you at this moment how I should treat it, I know just what you would say."

"Very likely."

"You would say, 'Burn it unread.'"

"Indeed I should *not*, for I happened to have seen you read—at least, a portion of it." Then, after a momentary hesitation, "It is nothing very serious or annoying, I hope?"

"I don't know about the *serious* part. It's rather annoying, not so much because it has given me trouble to read it, but because it is one of a *series*."

"Oh! You have received others?"

"No, thank goodness, not *others*. No; I am one of three men who have each received a document *like* this." He tapped the letter with one long finger as he spoke, then, as if by some sudden after thought, he held out the letter to her.

"Do you *wish* me to read it?" she did not put out her hand for the letter.

"Do I? Why, yes. I think I do—why not? Haven't I sworn you to secrecy? Aren't we fellow-conspirators from this moment? Take it!" He had got back all his accustomed jocular manner, a manner, by the by, familiar only to his intimates—the Mr. Lord, of "down town" was a very sober and dignified personage. "Read it,

and bridge the gulf between us ; when you have read it you'll feel as I do—a sort of guiltiness, a sense of fellowship with villany. Yes, miss, when one becomes a part correspondent with such a person as must have penned—no, pencilled—that, one can't quite hold up one's head as of old. Don't you feel a lowering of your moral tone already?"

Madeline was bending a serious face over the letter, and she did not look up as she asked—

"What sort of a person do you fancy as writing this, Mr. Lord?"

"What sort? Oh, some illiterate, dirty-fingered socialist. One of the fellows who are going about among the saloons drinking foul beer and talking about the wrongs of the labouring classes, and who never did an honest week's work, if they could help it."

"I think you are in error there, Mr. Lord," said Madeline, soberly. "If you look carefully at these letters you will find now and then one that is too well formed to be the work of an unskilful penman ; and as for the dirty fingers, can't you see that this paper is 'smudged' quite artistically?"

She held up the paper as she spoke, but he did not so much as glance at it. He was looking intently at her instead.

"This letter," she went on, now quite absorbed in the matter before her, "was written by one who knows how to write and to spell—yes, and how to frame a telling sentence."

"It's a telling epistle altogether. Let us see ; how does it run? Just read it aloud, won't you, now that I'm quite cool. It may sound better."

He was smiling grimly now, but the girl did not enter into his mood with her usual readiness. She began to read the letter very gravely.

"'Mr. Lord,—Sir'—it is spelled 'sur,'" she interpolated, "and that word is not often mis-spelled, except in novels, even by the illiterate. —'Sir, This too notify yew that onless you withdraw from that wicked and crooel society of tyrants, that are bandid toogeather too oppres the poor and crush the labouring man, trubble will come to you and all your munny can not proteckt you from "VENGEANCE.'"

She drew a long breath, and laid the letter down. Her brows were knit and frowning ; she did not look at him, and for some moments she did not speak.

"Well!" he said finally, and when she lifted her eyes she saw that he was smiling.

"Pardon me," she said, "you said something about a *series*."

He started, and dropped his eyes for a second.

"Yes," with a short laugh, "I did. I simply meant that two others have received the same or similar documents within the week."

Again for some moments she was silent. She was already more interested in this anonymous letter than she cared to show ; but she saw that he did not wish to pursue the subject from her point of view —to treat it seriously, or as a personal issue. Again she let her eyes rest upon the scrawled page, and suddenly she uttered an exclamation.

"Well!" he said again, "what now?"

"Pardon me," she said. "You need not answer my question unless

you choose. Those other letters, were they copies of this or *duplicates?* You said the same, or——"

"They were duplicates," he answered, promptly. "Why do you ask?"

"Because that letter was written by a woman. See!"

"A woman!" He caught the letter from her hand, and began to scan it with a puzzled air.

"Look at the less important words—the words of one syllable, the ones that we ordinarily form with least attention—note the *last* syllables of some of the longer words." She got up and stood beside his chair. "See here, and here, and here. And note the language, in spite of its cloak of bad spelling. And then, what *man* uses japonica for a perfume. A woman, and a woman of some degree of refinement, wrote that letter."

"And the others?"

"And the others—if they are duplicates of this."

CHAPTER X.

MR. FOLLINGSBEE'S CASE.

"EH! Why, Drexel, man, come in, come in—and shut the—door; excuse me—but—in half a breath—I'll—be—with you."

The speaker—a small, plump man, with a shrewd face and keen, twinkling grey eyes—jerked out these words, sitting at a low office desk and writing hurriedly, while he spoke turning his head half over his shoulder to look at the young man in the doorway, and instantly jerking it back again to glance at the written page, his pen all the while keeping up its hasty scrawling.

The place was the private office of Mr. Follingsbee, the lawyer, and the speaker was Mr. Follingsbee's self.

Roger Drexel was swift to comply with all the jerky requests flung at him; to enter, close the door, and seat himself.

"Don't let me interrupt you," he said, smilingly; "my time is not valuable!"

"Umph!" the little lawyer was scratching off an address upon a big, legal-looking envelope, and he never once stopped in his work of superscribing, enclosing, and sealing while he said:

"*Your* time,—no—I dare say—not. Young fellows—nowadays have too much time."

Drexel laughed.

"I'm afraid *I* had, to-day."

"Fudge!" He rang a bell, and whirled about in his chair so that he faced the door leading to his outer office. Almost instantly the door opened wide and a boy appeared, hat in hand.

"Deliver this at once," said the lawyer; and then, as the boy went out and the door closed, he jumped up and put out his hand to Drexel.

"Now," he said, "I'm at your service—and glad to see you," reseating himself in a chair near Drexel. "It's not often you honour *me*—although Mrs. Follingsbee's humble drawing-room *does* see you sometimes."

Drexel laughed. Mrs. Follingsbee's "humble drawing-room" was one of the most notable drawing-rooms of society, and the lady herself a social dowager of no small importance.

Mr. Follingsbee had married a woman with a fortune; and while his wife enjoyed her fortune and lent a hand to the pulling down and building up of the social fabric, her unnatural lord went back to his office and his briefs, and went sturdily on rearing a fortune for himself. They understood one another perfectly, and were a most happy and practical couple.

"In Mrs. Follingsbee's drawing-room one is tolerably sure of a welcome. I don't feel so certain about bearding you here in your den, especially as I don't come with a thirty thousand dollar case in my hand."

"No, I dare say not, not you; your expensive *cases* are carried to a very different market," said the lawyer, drily.

"Mr. Follingsbee, I didn't think you had it in you; I've heard that the Fat Men's Club visited most terrible punishment upon punsters, and that——"

The lawyer broke in with a hearty laugh as he looked down upon his own rotund person.

"Fortune couldn't make me admit it to my wife," he said, "but I wouldn't be surprised to learn any day that I had been elected. I think I *am* qualified."

"Yes," said Drexel, "I think so." And then his look became graver, and he dropped his tone of badinage. "Seriously, Mr. Follingsbee, I did not call upon you in business hours for nothing; I wanted a few words with you, and if you have the leisure——"

"I have, sir, I have," broke in the lawyer, his tone now quite serious. "I'm quite at your service."

"Thanks. My errand seems perhaps a little belated. I am in search of information which, by the way, you may not see fit to give."

"My dear sir, I assure you——"

"One moment, please. I have also a message."

"Ah!"

"A message from a dead man."

"Upon my word!"

"You are aware, perhaps, that I was beside the man who was executed two weeks ago for the murder of Jacob Traill, beside him in his last moments."

"What, not—at the execution? Upon the scaffold? *You!*"

"Yes, I. He asked it at the last. It was a strange fancy, and he was indulged in it. I stood with the chaplain close at his side when the drop fell." His face paled slightly, and his eyes drooped.

Mr. Follingsbee shuddered openly.

"Heavens, what a horrible experience!"

"It was horrible, indeed." He got up and took a turn across the narrow office. "He gave me a message for you and your associates."

"Yes?"

"He asked me to thank you in his name."

"Eh—in his *name?*"

"I mean, of course, *for* him. He asked me to thank you for all you did and all that you sought to do in his behalf."

Mr. Follingsbee was silent a moment.

"Well," he said finally, "that is more than he said to *me*—to any of us. A strange case, a strange case!" Then he jerked his chair closer to that occupied by his visitor.

"Drexel," he said, "you're a queer fellow. How in the world came *you* interested in that chap. But pardon me, perhaps you knew him."

"If I had," said Drexel, "it would have been my duty to come forward and make his identity known. No, you heard my testimony at the trial."

"Surely. That you were, so far as you knew, third upon the scene, that the prisoner had already given up his pistol to Vaughan—no, to Girard. I remember thinking what an admirable witness you were. You wasted no words."

"I did not mean to. The business was odious to me."

"I dare say. Drexel, I never took you for a Quixote, but, really, this looks like it. The fellow was undoubtedly a murderer, a rather mysterious and interesting one, to be sure, but yet—a murderer."

"Undoubtedly," said Drexel, quietly.

"And you were with him at the last? Well, then, I dare say you could give me information, me, his lawyer. Come now, did he open his mouth at the last?"

"Not to make communications."

"Not even to tell his name?"

"Not even that."

"Nor his motive?"

"Nor his motive."

The lawyer mused a moment, then—

"You said something about wanting information," he hazarded.

"I want to ask some questions quite on my own responsibility. And I want to beg you not to question *me* in return—at least, not now. I will begin by telling all I have to tell of my reasons for asking these questions. They are purely my own. I am not acting for anyone, unless it might be for the dead man."

"Um! rather late for that, I should say."

"Perhaps—yes. I mean that I am merely following up a train of thought; I can't even call it a theory. I *have* felt considerable interest in the case, in the prisoner. I have some fancies. I want to see how your experience fits into them."

"You want to wed experience to imagination. Well, it has been done before. What do you want to know?" the lawyer abruptly concluded.

Drexel answered him in the same manner.

"I want to know who retained you to defend the prisoner."

The lawyer stared at him a moment in silence.

"So you are *there?*" he said at last. "Well, of course, you will consider what I say as—a—confidence?"

"Of course."

"Well—I can't tell you."

"You mean you will not."

"I *can't* tell you who retained me. *I don't know.*"

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE CLIENT.

"YOU don't *know!* Pardon me, Mr. Follingsbee, if you are under any promise of secrecy, or for any other reason do not wish to answer me, tell me so frankly. I have not asked you this from mere curiosity."

"I am quite sure of that, Drexel, quite sure," responded the lawyer, heartily. "I'm under no promise of secrecy. I don't often make terms of that sort in these matters, and I'm very willing to tell you all that I can, which is not much, and won't take long. I must repeat I don't *know* who retained me."

"I don't think that I understand——" began Drexel.

"No more do I. But let me tell you the way of it. On the fifth day after the murder—I am precise about the date for a reason which you will soon understand—I received a printed letter."

"Printed?"

"Well, type-written—it's about the same thing, I take it—asking me, without any preamble, any reason, or ifs, or ands, if I would undertake the defence of the man who had caused the death of Jacob Traill, and for how much. I was to name my price, and my answer must be definite. There must be no correspondence further than this. If I accepted, I must conduct the affair in my own way. In case of acceptance, the money would be paid to me at once—*in advance.*"

"Ah!"

"Yes. I don't wonder you are surprised; *I* was. And it takes a good deal to surprise a lawyer, you know. It surprised me so much that after a brief deliberation I replied to the note after this fashion—'I will undertake the defence of *your protégé* for the small sum of *ten thousand dollars.*' There was no signature to the letter from my eccentric correspondent, and I attached none to my reply. I posted that letter at dark, and the next morning I had been in my office here exactly ten minutes when a large package was put into my hand. I opened it and found twenty five-hundred dollar notes and a scrap of paper containing a few printed words. 'Herewith find the fee for defence of the man *accused* of slaying Jacob Traill. You will *not* inform the prisoner, should he question you, concerning the instigators of his defence.'"

He stopped like one who has reached the end of a rather interesting story, and looked expectantly across at Drexel, who certainly showed sufficient interest, if his kindling eyes and the intense expression of his face went for evidence of interest.

"And was that all?" he asked, after a long moment of silence.

"All that concerns the instigators; it was good money, and I set to work at once to engage my associates, and begin at the case."

"And the prisoner. *Did* he ask you for information?"

"No. He didn't come up to my expectation *there*—any more than

he did in anything else. When I called upon him, in his cell, and told him I had come to serve him as counsel, he only said listlessly, 'Yes, I expected you.' Naturally, I asked him how that came about, and for reply he put into my hand a slip of paper. It was printed like those received by me, and ran thus : 'Able defence is secured to you. Accept it.'"

"Well!"

"Of course I expected questions then and there. He took back the slip as soon as I had read it, tore it to bits before my eyes, and said never a word. From first to last that fellow never spoke to us, except to reply to a direct question."

"I can well believe that," said Drexel. "And how did he reply to your questions?"

"Courteously at first, and for the most part; but listlessly, very; betraying, from first to last, not the faintest interest in his own fate. He had no defence to make and no statement of any sort. He meant to plead guilty. If there *must* be the form of a defence gone through with, very well. We must ask nothing, expect nothing from him."

For some moments both were silent; then Drexel said—

"You have obliged me greatly, Mr. Follingsbee. It seems almost churlish not to make you full explanation here and now. I have been from the first oddly interested in this strange case. But my ideas are at present too vague to be put into words; I want to learn all that I can, and if I find that my inquiries lead to anything, I will enlighten you—at the right time."

The little lawyer waved one hand airily.

"Don't say another word about it, my dear sir," he said. "*My* interest in these cases in *ante*-mortem. If I can be of any further service——"

"One moment—will you tell me the address to which you sent your reply to that type-written letter?"

"Really—but, yes I will; it's a post-office box." He got up, went across the room, and took from a standing row of long, thin books, that looked like small hotel registers, one of the thinnest. It contained addresses, and seemed to be alphabetically arranged. In a moment he had copied the number upon a card and put it into Drexel's hand.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW HOUSE.

ONE morning late in June, Moina La Croix and her father were sitting in a cheery little room in their New York home.

They had taken possession of their present residence, a new and good house in a pleasant quarter of the city, only that week, and were well pleased and very comfortable.

After nearly two weeks of indecision and "looking about," they had decided upon this place, and it had been made ready for them with that care and speed with which things *can* be done in that great city, when energy is at the helm and the order is *carte blanche*.

Moina, as she passed the black coffee which her father loved, and

pressed upon him the dainty breakfast cakes, was in the best of spirits ; but Mr. La Croix looked languid, and the girl was not blind to this.

"Poor father mine!" she said softly ; "he is tired of being a householder already, after a three days' experience. *Is* it that, dear, or is it what went before? Is it our hotel and *café* existence, with Mr. Crashaw for *chaperone?*"

Miles La Croix smiled.

"I think it was *you* who found Mr. Crashaw somewhat tedious, my daughter. I am well enough. My sleep was broken last night, that is all. You know it always leaves me weary when I lose my usual sleep."

"And you have slept so well of late, and for a long time. Oh, I hope you will not have another long succession of those sleepless, nervous nights, papa!—such as you had in St. Petersburg—and again in Paris."

Miles La Croix moved uneasily, and a slight frown contracted his usually calm brow.

"Nonsense, my dear," he said ; "it is only the constant movements of late. We had been so quiet, for months, in London, that I, wanderer as I have been for years, really felt at first unsettled, like a householder turned adrift ; when we have been a little longer in this pleasant, quiet street, I shall be quite tranquil."

"Yes, I hope so." Moina was evidently thinking of something else as she sipped her coffee and looked out toward the window. "Yes, I am sure that you will." Then she seemed to recall her wandering attention, and asked, as her father put down his cup, "Have you quite finished, papa?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then," half rising while she spoke, "is there anything that you wish me to do?"

He considered a moment.

"Yes," he said, "there's a few moments' writing—that is all ; merely the copying of a list of con——of names." He got up slowly and turned toward an inner door. "We will go to my desk," he said. "The list is there."

In the rear of the morning room was another and smaller apartment, well lighted by a double window, and fitted up as a study Moina followed her father into this room, closed the door, and hastened to draw a big easy chair up beside the desk.

"Sit here, papa ; you will be most comfortable so. If you will give me your keys I will open the desk. Ah! there," she seated herself and took up a pen ; "and now the list."

"It is in that drawer ; yes, that is it. Shall I read it for you, Moina?"

"No, papa ; I will read the list aloud, copying as I go. It is Mr. Crashaw's hand, I see—and that always annoys you."

And so for half an hour the work at the desk went on. When it was done she turned to look at her father.

"Anything more, papa?"

"Yes—no—not now, Moina. I don't feel like dictating——. What is it? You want to say something, I see."

Moina closed the desk, and came and stood close beside his chair.

"I have been thinking, for the past two days, about the young lady we met on the steamer—Miss Payne. She asked me so cordially to call upon her. Of course, I couldn't ask her to call upon *me*, as we had no permanent residence; and she waived all that very sweetly, and asked *me* to come, and so, too, did her chaperon, Mrs. Ralston. They hoped they might be of service to me, and I think they meant it. I liked them both very much; and——" She had been hurrying on in an eager, half-argumentative tone, like one who half fears to be opposed, when the look of surprise upon her father's face, and a slight gesture from him checked her speech.

"My dear," he said, smiling slightly, "did Miss Payne give you her address?"

"Yes; at least she gave me the address of a friend—a Mrs. Girard, I think. I have it in my little desk upstairs. She told me that her plans were not definitely settled, but that she should go *first* to her friend's house, and would remain there until all was arranged."

"Then go by all means, and call upon Miss Payne. She was, indeed, most kind to you; and you are totally without companions of your own sex. Did you think I meant to make a hermit of you—my daughter?"

Moina flushed, and her eyes drooped for a moment. "Not quite that, papa mine. But I had your work in mind, and if my social propensities were likely to prove incompatible——"

"Incompatible! Moina, sit down again. You are usually clear-headed—intuitive. Tell me, why did it occur to you to think of Miss Payne in connection with my—with *our* work?"

"*Our* work! that sounds best, papa. I'll tell you frankly. I connected the two because I saw, or fancied—on board the steamer—that Mr. Crashaw wanted me to avoid, or not to see, too much of Miss Payne."

Miles La Croix started, and a shadow crossed his face and remained in the eyes which he screened behind his hand, before turning them upon his daughter.

"Moina, are you sure of what you say?"

"Yes, papa. I am sure—quite, quite sure." She dropped down upon the chair nearest him, and went on as if determined to free her mind upon this subject. "On two or three occasions Mr. Crashaw broke in upon our conversation in a manner not to be mistaken by *me*, and on two or three others." She stopped abruptly, and cast a deprecating look at her father.

"Go on, my child. Has he ventured to address you upon the subject?"

"Upon the subject of my growing intimacy with Miss Payne, do you mean, papa? Yes, he *has*."

He was silent a moment, then, "How did you reply to him?" he asked.

"I did *not* reply, except to ignore all such remarks as concerned Miss Payne, or my talks with her, papa. Has he spoken of this to you?"

"No, Moina."

"Papa, I'm going to say something else. It's unpleasant, and I feel—I feel ashamed to have to say it. But—but tell me, please, have you noticed—noticed that he is much more polite to me—much more interested—and—and disagreeable since I became my aunt's heiress?"

His head became suddenly erect; his hand fell, and he looked at his daughter with a gleam of haughtiness in his eyes.

"My daughter! Are you sure of this?—quite sure?"

And now the girl's head was lifted, and pride shone in her eyes and spoke in her voice.

"I have not been so fond of his society that I could well flatter myself, or imagine such a thing. If the man were not so disagreeable to me, I should not have noticed, most likely, that he was *exerting* himself upon my account. I hope that I love my fellow-creatures well enough to work side by side, if need be, even with Rufus Crashaw; but to have him forced upon me *socially*—to have him take advantage of his connection with *you*, to help—to enable him to annoy me. Papa, you must not permit that."

"And I *will* not, Moina. The thought is as distasteful to me as to you. I never anticipated such a thing. How should I? Rufus Crashaw!" A red flush was coming over his face. One of his hands began to tremble. He got up slowly and began pacing the floor.

Moina watched him for a moment, and then, without another word, went hastily out of the room.

When she was gone, the old man turned toward the door which had closed behind her, and stretched out his trembling hands.

"I must stand between them," he muttered. "The common cur! How *dare* he? Rufus Crashaw, you may take *my* hand as an equal, but not hers. I have given my life to you and yours. But my Moina, my other Moina's child—her legacy to me. I will stand between you. I draw the line, if need be, between my life and hers. Mine you may have, hers—*never!*"

As he stood thus—his white head thrown back, his tall form drawn to its fullest height, his face flushed and his fierce eyes kindling—he made a splendid, a striking picture of commanding, noble, old age, and furnished, in his person alone, a sufficient reason for having been chosen as a leader of enthusiasts. Head of a community where in its body—the ranks—dignity and nobility of presence was deplorably lacking. Rich as it might be in brawn and muscle and stentorian speech.

CHAPTER XIII.

"FOR A YEAR."

WHEN it was decided upon the further shore, that certain brethren should come to America for the single purpose of aiding and encouraging the weaker brothers on this side, the power at the head of a mighty society had said, "Let Rufus Crashaw lead this enterprise. It needs brain and nerve, cleverness and daring; and let him choose, under certain restrictions, his associate workers."

When Rufus Crashaw heard, he pondered for some days, and then he addressed a letter to the CHIEF, to whom, at last, all things of first importance were referred. And this was the beginning of a long series of evolutions, which ended in the presence, in New York, of Miles La Croix, and Rufus Crashaw, of Jules Passauf, of Rene Savorin ; and, by another steamer, at an *earlier* date, of Disset, the late secretary to Sharlaw, the master, and one other person, insignificant enough in seeming, but by no means an unimportant limb of the great brotherhood.

And Moina La Croix, a lay sister, and an ardent sympathizer, was not the only woman who came with them, with, if not quite of them.

In the cabin of the steamer which brought Disset was a lady, frail, delicate, shrinking from the approach of strangers, seeming to know no one, and a manifest invalid. And, near her sometimes, but oftener pacing the deck, or sitting in charming attitudes in the most beauteous of deck-chairs, was another, younger, and vastly more attractive ; a bonny-eyed, bonny-haired little creature, dressed in garments of the simplest and richest ; and, on the steamer's books, they were written down Madame Orloff and daughter, Sacha Orloff, from St. Petersburg to New York.

The MASTER, who had planned for this passage, with an eye to future possibilities, had decided that each must be a stranger to all the others ; and so the little band had set out in detachments, Miles La Croix and his daughter first to take passage, later Rufus Crashaw, then Rene Savorin ; last, and for reasons known only to himself and Crashaw, as a steerage passenger, the secretary, Jules Passauf.

The reasons for this simple bit of preliminary precaution had seemed well enough to Miles La Croix ; in fact, the arrangement suited him admirably. As a worker in the great cause, he welcomed as brother-helpers, Crashaw, Passauf, all who came, with time, or money, labour of hand or brain, to lay upon the altar of the "*great cause.*" As a private individual, when there was no immediate work to do, he preferred the company of his daughter, or even his own solitude. And, on this voyage across the seas, since it could as well be so, he was well satisfied to have no other society. It was not a part of his plan that Crashaw should find means to come naturally into contact with him. But it had been brought about, and he was not able to say, even to himself, that it had not been an accidental occurrence.

But Moina did not see so clearly the need for this dissimulation. She was very willing to be a stranger to Rufus Crashaw, and to Rene Savorin as well, although she felt no aversion to Savorin ; indeed, they were very good friends.

But, when they were brought together, and presented to her as strangers, she had rebelled in secret, and had taken the first opportunity to make her father acquainted with her feelings.

"We might have foreseen this, papa," she said. "If it seemed best that your party should not be identified *as* such, the others ought to have gone by another vessel, as that man who came with Mr. Sharlaw's letter did."

Moina, and her father also, had yet to learn that Mr. Sharlaw had made other additions to the American colony.

Miles La Croix was nominally at its head, all orders must come from him, all members be subject to him. But Rufus Crashaw had been the last of that outgoing colony to be closeted with Sharlaw, the master; the last save *one*, and that one was not Miles La Croix—it was *Sacha Orloff.*

When Moina La Croix was assured of her father's willingness to have her resume her acquaintance with the friend she had made on shipboard, she lost no time in seeking Madeline. And that same day saw her alight from a hired cab at Olive Girard's door.

Olive had heard of Moina, and was not unprepared for her visit. But, while the two were still exchanging the first formalities of greeting, a pretty brougham stopped beside Moina's cab, and Madeline herself appeared; she was glad to see Moina, and would have hurried her away, but for Olive's interposition.

"Miss La Croix was your charge to me, my dear," she said, smilingly, "and I must see a little of her now that she is here. She will pardon the informality, I am sure, if you have let her know what very old friends we are." And so the three had chatted for a gay half-hour in Olive's pretty drawing-room, and Moina had still in store the pleasure of seeing Miss Payne in her own home.

At least, that is how she put it to herself as she drove home, with the number of Mr. Lord's fine mansion written upon one of Madeline's visiting cards.

"And they will both call upon us, papa," she said, when reviewing for him the incidents of her visit, "Miss Payne and Mrs. Girard. And Mrs. Girard hopes that you dine out sometimes, and that we will both make a note of her 'at home' days. Why, papa, I feel so different already, almost as if I were fairly launched, a giddy society woman."

Mr. La Croix smiled his amusement; there had been a day, long past now, when the giddy whirl of society had held him in its vortex. Moina's innocent gaiety, her delight in the kindness of these two gentlewomen pleased him. He was glad, for her sake, that she had found these friends so soon, and proud that she was so well fitted to adorn any drawing-room, however stately it might be.

"We shall hardly be society people, my daughter," he said. "But there is no reason why you should not receive these ladies here, and visit them in their homes. I do not wish to make a hermit of *you*, Moina."

"And yourself, papa?"

He did not answer her immediately. He seemed to be thinking.

"I am not so old," he said, finally, "that I can no longer enjoy the society of charming women, and it would make me glad and proud to see you among them, one of them, and the peer of any—but," and here a cloud came over his face, "to do these things *now* would bring back to me too many bitter memories. I foreswore society, the world of riches, and gaiety, long ago, my daughter. I think you know why."

The girl's head drooped.

"Yes, papa. It was because of poor mamma's sad fate, of the injustice done her, my poor, poor mother! To have been reared so luxuriously—and to die like that!"

"Hush, child," his voice was husky, "leave the past to the old. She knew the bitterness in *my* heart before she left me, and she bade me keep it out of yours—out of your life. Sometimes I ask myself if I have done all that I might for you."

"Oh, papa mine! You have done everything for me!"

"I don't know—I don't know," he bent a searching look upon her as she sat before him upon a low hassock, looking half wistfully up into his face. "There are some things I have meant to say to you, Moina. I have put it off too long. Do you feel like talking seriously? but I need not have asked that. Do you want to talk a little about my work—the work that brought me here?"

"Yes, papa. Yes, indeed," she drew her hassock nearer and rested an arm upon his knee.

"You asked me some questions about our work when we were coming over, I believe, and I would not talk about it. You must know, my dear, that this land is as strange and new to me as to you. But it is a land of promise, a land where the great work can go on unhampered. We are in Europe, as you know, one body, and well knit together; here, in America, there are many leagues similar in nature, in purpose, to ours, every great city has its societies, some of them numbering hundreds, some thousands. Some of these leagues are linked to similar ones in other places. But there are many heads, where we have but one. That is why we are strong, and why here they are weak. If all the leagues, unions, orders, societies, as they call them, were *united* as one, the fate of the nation would be in their hands. If, then, they were joined to us we would be the arbiters of the world, stronger than kings, than church or state, no great monopolies could override our united forces, no political or social power dare ignore us. Do you see, now, why we have come to America?"

The girl's face glowed with the enthusiasm his words had awakened.

"To bring all these bodies together, papa; to make them one with the *great league*, oh, papa—it would be the millennium! No more oppressed poor then, no more starving women and children, no more labourers seeking work and not finding it, no more evictions, work for all, fair wages. Oh, papa mine, why am I not a man—why may I not help you more? Papa, papa, *why* may I not come up higher? Why not into the inner circle with you—with you in everything?"

In her enthusiasm she caught his hands in hers and gripped them fiercely.

The look which met her eager gaze was so very grave that it calmed and awed her, she unclasped one hand gently and laid it upon her upturned forehead.

"My daughter, we have said something of this before."

"Yes, papa—a year ago, almost."

"I bade you wait a year then, I said you were too young, we may not admit minors to our inner circle, Moina."

"So you said then, papa."

"I might have said that we do not admit women, we have such a rule, but it has its exceptional clauses."

"And you — you would make an exception of me, in my favour?"

He was silent a moment, when he spoke again it was as if he addressed himself or another quite as much as her.

"A year ago I said wait, my thought then was for your extreme youth. I fancied I could see some reason why it might be well for you to become one of the inner circle. It has its charities, its missionary labours; but I was thinking chiefly then of the good to yourself, my daughter. Of course, it is not of that *you* would think first. One does not enter the inner circle for selfish purposes, we lay self aside at the threshold, we must not look for honour, or glory, or ease in that service, dear; we must instead be ready for hard service, to obey without question, to labour without hope or reward, without visible result perhaps. We may become martyrs, missionaries, soldiers, servants. We no longer belong to ourselves, we belong to the great cause. To all our suffering and sinned against brethren the world over, we become vindicators, avengers, pioneers, learners of things new or strange."

He was no longer looking at her, his eyes were glowing and gazing up into vacancy, the fever heat was glowing in his cheek, she could feel it in the pressure of his hand, she stirred slightly and the movement recalled him. He looked down at her and drew his hand away.

"A year ago," he said, with abrupt change of tone, "I encouraged you to think that I would take you into the inner circle. I had a selfish motive."

"Selfish?" she laughed lightly, "selfish, papa—you?"

"Yes, I said to myself, I am old, sometimes I think that my days are not many, and I shall leave my daughter almost penniless. If I bequeath her to the *inner circle* she will be cared for, watched over, and for my sake they will not make her work too heavy."

"Oh, papa!"

"If things had remained as they were a year ago I might present you for acceptance, perhaps. As it is," again he bent grave eyes upon her face, "as it is I ask you, my daughter, to wait."

"To wait—papa——"

"To wait another year. One moment, I must tell you why. A year ago you were Moina La Croix, penniless, or nearly so, for my income dies with me: *now* you are an heiress, Moina. You have seen much of the world—the world of nature; much of cities, and something of people. But you do not know society. Perhaps you do not quite know yourself. And now that you may freely choose your life, the life you prefer, I will not bind you. Your mother bade me look to your happiness, mine she took with her; I was to make you as happy as lay within my power, and, my dear, I have *tried*. Added to this is the last wish of your aunt, your mother's sister. Her fortune was yours to enjoy, it was to be secured to you. I know your generosity, my daughter, all your willingness to sacrifice self, all your zeal for the good work. But I must not lead you on, I must not *help* you in this, and it would make it easier for me if you would accept my decision, make it your own, and follow it out cheerfully with all your heart. It would make it easier—*much* easier for *me*."

His eyes sought hers almost wistfully; something in the gaze and in his tone seemed to quicken all her senses.

"Your decision, papa—what is it?" she asked, quietly.

"It is that you do not think again of the inner circle, of any of the work, save as you see it now, for one more year; that, during that year, you shall use your aunt's wealth as a young and care-free heiress ought. Be happy with it, be gay, seek the friends you have made, and make still others. And do not think *once* that you are doing a selfish, a wrong thing. Let the life your sainted mother would have chosen for you, be yours; it is what she would have *wished*, Moina, be sure of that."

"Then it is settled, papa. If it is your wish and hers, it is mine. I will press no further behind your mystery of mysteries. I will not *speak* of it again—for a year."

"For a year, my daughter, I ask no more."

CHAPTER XIV.

AMONG THE SOCIALISTS.

RUFUS CRASHAW made his appearance on the morning of the next day, he did not linger to converse with Moina, whom he found alone in the breakfast-room; he asked at once for her father, and was shown into the little study, where Miles La Croix sat wrinkling his brows over some long letters.

In less than ten minutes after Crashaw's arrival, Rene Savorin rang the bell. He did not inquire for Mr. La Croix, but seated himself near Moina, like one assured of his welcome.

"What early callers," said Moina, "we have only just finished breakfast."

His eyes meet hers, full of laughter; they were very good friends, these two, and had put unnecessary ceremony behind them.

"And I have only just finished mine," he said, "in fact, I finished it rather hurriedly, I wanted to get here——" he broke off as he met her eye, and laughed again.

"I observe," said Moina, with mock gravity, "that you do not ask who is here before you, although I distinctly said *callers*."

"Do you really?"

"Yes, and by the longing look about your—mouth, I judge that you would like more breakfast."

"It's amazing to have one's thoughts read like that—it's alarming."

Moina's hands began to flit about the coffee service.

"But you need offer me nothing but coffee. How long has he been here?"

"Ten minutes."

"Then I am safe. Did he say anything to you about a meeting?"

"A meeting? No."

"He wants your father to address an open meeting to-night. He means to ask you to go."

"Oh, well, I should like to go."

"With him?"

"With papa," she laughed, as she gave him the cup of coffee, and their eyes again challenged each other.

"Oh, then you are ambitious, you want to sit on a board platform

at an elevation of three feet or more from the floor ; you are already growing away from the common people then, very good," gulping down the coffee, "I came here with most amiable intentions. I was about to say, Miss La Croix, let Crashaw escort your papa to the speaker's rostrum, and let them sit there side by side, while *I* take charge of *you*. Well ! if I go away leaving this unsaid, Crashaw will say it."

"Oh ! and in that case, who will escort papa to that three foot elevation you call a platform ? "

"Oh, somebody else—a big American, or Irishman."

"And you ? "

"I—I will sit aloof isolated, and see you smile upon Crashaw, and gnash my teeth."

"Never ! So much pleasure is not in store for you, Mr. Savorin, but when do you intend making me that little speech ? "

"About ? "

"Miss La Croix let Crashaw, etc."

Instantly he threw himself into an attitude, and rehearsed the speech with numerous interpolations.

"Mr. Savorin," said Moina, after a little burst of stifled laughter, "I accept your well-meant offer ; I accept your services. To spare your friend, Mr. Crashaw, trouble, is, I know, one of the objects of your existence."

His face became serious instantly.

"And to spare you the least annoyance is another object of my existence," he said, gently. "Then you do really care to attend this meeting."

"Really, I do. Since we came here somehow the great *cause* has assumed a new and grave aspect to me. I want more light."

"Upon what ? "

"Oh, so many things." They were both serious enough now. "This new world somehow seems to me so much bigger than our old one."

"And so it is."

"Yes, and I am wondering, Rene, *how*, in years and years even, is the light going to be carried over all this country. How are the people to be reached. They are so many, and so widely scattered."

He put down his empty cup, and drew his chair nearer to her.

"We don't expect to make our converts one at a time, Mademoiselle ; that would be the work of centuries. Have you not observed how great masses of people are moved, like great waves, as if by one impulse ; the big wave is composed of an infinite number of water drops, but they move as one, when the tide sweeps inland. In this country are an endless number of societies, some weak, some strong, some with objects akin to ours, others with no object almost. And these, all of them, are the waves, each having a motive power in its leaders. We intend to reach the *leaders*. Once we number these captains of companies in our ranks, the rest will follow, each man will bring us his own."

Savorin was growing enthusiastic, but Moina looked pre-occupied.

"I see," she said, musingly ; then she arose suddenly. "Rene, let

us go into the drawing-room. There is something I want—I want you to tell me."

When they were seated in the drawing-room, as far away as possible from the study, and from Rufus Crashaw, Moina began. It was not the first time these two had talked in this friendly and confidential fashion ; next to her father, Moina depended upon Rene for help, for service, for information. But to-day she was more anxious and serious than usual.

"I want to talk to you about papa, Rene. I am growing fearful lest his new duties and responsibilities should prove more than he can bear. I don't seem to have realized it somehow until lately ; but papa is an old man, and not strong. Of late he seems so easily wearied—and worried."

"He is taking this change—his new position, very seriously," said Savorin, gently, "because it *is* new to him ; that is all. He will soon become fitted into this new place. We shall all be working like so many clocks soon. Crashaw is a methodical fellow."

"Crashaw ?"

"Yes. He is your father's right-hand man, you know ; and will relieve him of much. Then you will come to-night ?"

She would, surely, she told him, and then their talk became rambling and gay once more.

There was much in New York that was new to them both ; and they were young enough to be enthusiastic.

That evening, Moina La Croix sat beside Rene Savorin, upon a hard wooden chair, in a not too conspicuous place in the big bare hall where the meetings of the Socialists were held.

Upon the long platform in front, bare and uninviting in appearance, sat her father, a splendid presence, but looking out of place in the midst of his surroundings.

Beside him was Rufus Crashaw, and near the two half-a-dozen men were grouped. Rough-looking men they were, as compared with the fine-looking courtly old man, or the more prosaic, yet spruce, younger one.

A row of flaming gas jets shed its light above them, and threw a glare over the front of the auditorium, while the remainder was less brightly illuminated.

The hall was well filled, and Moina, as she looked curiously about her, thought it was *not* a prepossessing audience. Men and women were mixed so indiscriminately, it seemed to her, that they must have arrived in the same haphazard fashion ; singly, in groups. Groups of men and groups of women ; and very few of the latter appeared to be under male escort. In one place, near the front, was a party of women, a dozen or more, each wearing a huge staring crimson rosette. They were very self-reliant in manner, and they whispered and gesticulated freely. Moina thought that, even without the huge crimson badges, they were, for the most part, rather *outré* in their dress.

There was a buzz of conversation, all about, and now and then a laugh, low or loud ; an excited word or phrase, or a too forcible gesture, drew the attention this way and that.

Moina stole occasional glances at the face of her escort, but ven-

tured no comment, and was glad when one of the group near her father arose and, with some difficulty, obtained the attention of the audience, and opened the meeting.

He was a short, stout man, with a red face and wheezy utterance. He was not, he stated, an orator, and he laid no claim to eloquence. He was a plain man, and wanted to state a few plain facts. He gave an outline history of the great monopolies of the day, the "Railroad Monopolies," the "Manufacturing Monopolies," the "Monopolies of Capital in all its Branches." The rich of the earth, he said, had joined hands to oppress the poor; and as the rich grew richer, the poor grew poorer. Whenever a great monopoly cut down the wages of its labourers, the wives and daughters of the monopolists appeared in new diamonds, and laces, and silks, There must be a revolution, a new order. Rather a *revolution* had already begun, the new order had already "sprung into being."

Moina was not deeply impressed; she was rather well-pleased when the communicator of plain facts sat down.

The next speaker was as quick and eager as the first had been slow and ponderous. He would deal in figures, he said, figures would not lie. He was intensely statistical. To the facts enunciated by his predecessor, he said his "*colleague*," *he* brought the *proof*. *He* demonstrated in figures how many millions capital had gained and labour lost. He cited the number of the great manufactories and of the underpaid labourers; he reduced everything to figures.

Then followed a fiery orator, overflowing with fine phrases and finer adjectives. He talked of Capital and Labour. Of the multiplication of commercial crises; "of private enterprise and public welfare; and of the GREAT IMPENDING CHANGE." A change for the better. A change for the working man. When this wondrous change came, there would be no more capitalists, no more underpaid serfs. All men would be free and equal; all labour equally divided; each man's share in the *good* things of the world the same. And then, in an overflow of rhetoric, he unfolded the plan of the new "Order." Money shall be no more. No man should monopolize a vast fortune or business. Labour should be the only currency. It should pay for everything. And all should be controlled by the State.

It was very instructive, but did not awaken much enthusiasm. Moina thought it rather dull, and found herself becoming more interested in a man who sat just before her, than in the speaker.

This man, a working man, to judge by his dress, seemed, like herself, more attracted by the faces about him than by the words of the orator of the moment. He was constantly looking about him, not obtrusively, not with an air of curiosity, but, Moina thought, as an observer who has a reason for being such. He seemed a man of middle age; his hair, which he wore rather long and curly, was streaked with grey, and a short crop of whiskers covered his throat, and the lower half of his face. His forehead seemed low under the overhanging mass of hair; but as he slowly turned his head from time to time, Moina caught a glimpse of a keen eye. Then, suddenly, a whispered word from Savorin recalled her wandering attention; her father had arisen. He was being presented by Rufus Crashaw.

In a neat little speech, Mr. Crashaw made known the eminence and worth of "the gentleman who was before them for the first time," who was here, in America, to devote himself to the Cause, *their* Cause, "the cause of humanity and right."

And then, Moina learned, greatly to her amazement, that Rufus Crashaw was *not* here for the first time, that he was already known to this audience as a socialist, an orator, a man of influence.

When Miles La Croix confronted his audience, there was a movement, as of aroused curiosity or renewed interest; and then began a genuine outburst of fiery eloquence.

The firm voice arose, and thrilled, and rang down the long hall. The tall form grew more erect and pliant and commanding; the refined old face lighted with enthusiasm. The dark eyes glowed and flashed. He spoke from his heart to the hearts of the people. Not statistically, not with learned detail, not in plausible generalities. He told of the joy of working for the good of our fellow-man, of the honour of belonging to an organised band of noble men—organized to uplift the weak, to protect the helpless, to right the wrongs of the oppressed—here, in our midst, and all the world over; of the helpfulness of banded goodness and wisdom; of the power of it. And he told how, all over the world, this noble brotherhood was growing—growing. How its strength was increasing, until finally, oppression must yield. The world must come up to its standard. Might must bow to right made strong, and right must prevail. "To-day," he said, "the rights of the weak are disregarded by the strong; soon, upon our banner, we shall emblazon these words, '*To protect the weak is the duty of the strong.*' What is the weakness of to-day will then have been enrolled beneath that banner; and it shall be weakness no longer. In the brotherhood there is *strength*.

"Oh! my brothers! when that day comes, the day when we shall clasp hands all around the globe. There need be no more wars, no more bloodshed; when all the united legions of east and west, north and south, are bound together in one common cause—the cause of right and humanity—*nothing* can gainsay us. The oppressed of all nations will turn their faces to us, and their wrongs will be righted by a word; but a word spoken by millions—millions, who are as one for liberty, for justice, for *right*."

Then he rapidly sketched a history of the secret and revolutionary societies of the globe. The four hundred thousand enrolled German Socialists, the many and mammoth trade and labour unions of England, the leagues of France, the allianoes of Italy, the great unions and banded knights of our own land.

"And what," said he, "is the aim of these. All over the world, is it not the same? Everywhere for liberty and against oppression, everywhere for equality, for justice. In each country men are struggling towards the light, calling out for help in their struggle. Think you it will be difficult to draw all these together upon one common platform, around one common banner? Some of you *know* how easy it is; how, all over Europe, men are responding to the call for union of forces, and the strength there is in numbers. I can go to every city in Europe to-day and find a brother. Yes, and not one,

but many! Such unity is not impossible to *us*. Impossible as it may be, as it *is*, to our present rulers, our kings and potentates, who are all striving for self, it is *not* impossible to the people, for they see in it the only way, the only path towards better things, all over the world. And we, all of us, can do *something*; it may be little, it may be much. Much or little, we accept gladly all honest effort. Asking only sincerity, faith, obedience, to the great and wise who are leading us towards the light.

"The idle and the careless may scoff. The weak of soul may fear and lose for ever the only help for such as they; the scornful and the man of one idea may pass us by on the other side; the rich, the men who oppress the labourer, and are loath to see his chains fall from him, will oppose. When they have ceased to flout, and begin to realize our might; but then it will be too late. When *our* sun rises their must set.

"Many good words are capable of bitter meanings; but one word there is that has no comparative, no better, nor best. That word is *right*. It is our watchword; bearing it aloft, we shall go on, and nothing that opposes the right shall stand. We shall sound far and wide our warning. We will speak gently, hope, and pray; but the Right must prevail; and the high priests and apostles, as of old, must stand ready—unflinching, steadfast. They must and will make way for the onward march of freemen, brothers in love, in hope, in life, in death, room for the new order. Make way for the right!"

When Miles La Croix ceased speaking and moved back a pace, the stillness of the room was marked; and then, suddenly, the applause broke forth; softly, at first, then louder, until the floor trembled, and Moina La Croix sat, strangely silent, her eyes tear-filled, the only one, it seemed to her, in all that audience, who made no demonstration of approval.

Rene was cheering lustily; and she noted, and remembered it afterwards, that the observing man just in front had ceased to be observing of any save the speaker, and was applauding with great heartiness.

CHAPTER XV.

"HOW IT WAS TO BE."

THEY did not wait for her father at the close of the meeting, but hastened out with the throng; Moina growing a little abashed as she clutched her escort's arm, and feeling her cheeks flush hotly as the heard from all sides comments, for the most part highly eulogistic upon her father's speech.

The people elbowed and pushed about her with scant courtesy, and some of the men nearest her stared unpleasantly. Shrinking away from one of these, she found on the other hand a group of the women with the red rosettes. They were talking loudly, and seemed again quite without the presence or need of male escort.

Something in the daintiness or the foreign air of Moina's attire

drew the attention of the foremost of these, and an audible comment was the natural consequence.

Moina's head was haughtily lifted, and she tried to draw her escort away.

"Well, of *all* the *manners!*" cried one of the women, and Moina, glancing over her shoulder, saw that the man who has been so observant just in front of her during the earlier moments of the meeting, and so deeply interested in her father's address, had thrust himself between her and the group of women.

He seemed stolidly unobservant now, looking neither at the women nor at Moina; but he held his place until they had reached the entrance, and she, walking on between him and her escort, felt at once a sense of relief and protection.

When they were out upon the pavement, the man stopped, and stood gazing for a moment after the receding figures of Moina and Savorin, then he turned, and taking up a position near the entrance, and a little in the shadow, stood as if waiting for someone.

"Well!"

He turned at the word spoken close at his ear.

A young man, of pleasing countenance and slouching gait and dress, stood at his elbow.

The waiting man drew him further into the shadow, and said in an undertone,

"Would you mind going back without me, and waiting a little—until I come?"

"*Without* you?" there was surprise in the first word, and good-humoured acquiescence in the last; "why, of course not."

"Very good, go ahead, then; but be sure and wait, and—you know your failing—don't go to sleep."

A stifled laugh was his only answer, and the two men turned in opposite directions: one striding toward the avenues, the other elbowing his way back again close to the entrance, and finally inside the vestibule, where he shifted about among the moving crowd to avoid attention or challenge, and so waited until the crowd began to thin and only a few laggards remained, strolling out in leisurely fashion, or talking in groups about the door.

Presently a party of four came out, conversing in low tones as they made their way to the pavement. And the waiting man recognized Miles La Croix, the speaker of the evening, Crashaw, and two of the platform satellites; as they passed him he strolled out behind them.

Still conversing and moving slowly, the four men walked to the nearest cab-stand, and there the two satellites bade them good night and retraced their steps, while La Croix and Crashaw entered a cab.

"Where to?" said the driver as he shut them in, and Miles La Croix's clear voice answered,

"Number 900, B—— Street."

"Beg yer pardon,"—it was the voice of the loitering stranger, who was loitering so close to the cab at that moment as to come into direct contact with the driver as he stepped back after closing the door.

With a surly acknowledgment of the apology, the man mounted to his place and drove away, and the stranger stepped quietly back, and, by the light of the nearest electric burner, wrote in a small note-book the address of Miles La Croix.

"It's a dwelling, I'm sure," he murmured, as he put away the little book; "I'll look it up later. Now for Ken;" and he sighed as he strode away.

* * * * * * *

"Is it you? So soon, old man. Well done, and welcome."

The face of the speaker was the pleasing face of the young man who had parted from the inquiring stranger at the door of the lecture hall. But the garments and the bearing were not the same. The first had given place to well-made trousers and waistcoat, immaculate linen, and a velvet smoking-coat, and the latter had become easy and carelessly graceful.

As the door closed upon the latest arrival, the young man crossed the room with an unlighted cigar in his hand, to stand before him and survey him with a laughing face.

"Upon my word, old fellow," he said, "this is a lark—for you. I confess I don't understand it yet."

"If you don't mind waiting until I get off these insignia of rank," the other said lightly, "I'll try and help you. I suppose you'll have to harbour the toggery till morning."

"If I could be quite sure that the Angel Gabriel or burglars would not invade my premises, I shouldn't mind that so much. Just fancy being found dead in one's room with two such uniforms as those in one's possession. Not that I so much mind the linsey-woolsey, nor the odour; it's the—dirt."

"Oh—I suppose *you* would have disguised *yourself* in a brand-new working-man's blouse—and so have been found out—seen through at once. But wait."

He swept aside a heavy curtain and disappeared behind it, while his friend returned to his lounging-chair and lighted his cigar.

The room in which he sat was his own, and beyond it were two others, making an exquisitely-fitted suite of bachelor apartments. All was luxurious, refined, tasteful, and the young man, who sat gazing about him with a queer smile upon his lips, looked the fitting master of the place; a slender, blonde young fellow, with delicate features, handsome blue eyes, and a sensitive mouth.

As his eyes wandered about his handsome room, the smile suddenly faded from his face, the corners of the fine mouth drooped, and the whole expression became one of sadness that was almost pathetic. He was looking at a little velvet case upon a bracket just opposite him. The case was closed, and a tiny key glistened in the lock; it was a picture-case, and no chance visitor in Kenneth Hosmer's room had ever seen it opened.

The hand holding the cigar dropped over the arm of his chair, and he sighed heavily and let his eyes fall from the velvet case, and his chin droop upon his breast. He was serious enough now, and seemed lost in sorrowful reverie.

While he sat thus the *portière* was thrust aside, and the man who

had entered as a middle-aged working man came out, middle-aged no longer, and no longer a working man. It was a tall muscular young man, with strongly-moulded and regular features, keen dark eyes, a firm chin and fine broad brow, who seated himself opposite his host; none other, in fact, than our friend Roger Drexel.

"Well, Ken," he said, "are you thinking of that fiery old foreigner and his fine oratory?"

"No," said the other, rousing himself; "not—exactly."

"Of course he pleased you?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Oh, I acknowledge his eloquence, and admit that I did not count upon anything like that when I set out with you to cure you of socialism. Seriously, Ken, I feel my responsibility in this business. Why won't you be content to stay with me, for the present, at least?"

The other got up with an impatient gesture.

"I have *told* you why, Drexel. My sympathy is with the—socialists—and—I want—I need absorbing occupation. Old man," turning upon him with sudden appeal in his voice, "what has made this change in you? Two years ago the cause was *good*, was worthy, you thought, of all the life we could put into it. I can't understand you! You go away as radical as the worst, or the best, of us, burning for reform, longing for opportunity to be active in the cause; you are gone a year; you come back lukewarm, uncommunicative, and you grow still worse, till you almost turn your back upon the society and stop in your tracks like a balky-filly, by Jove! You won't go forward one step, and you hold *me* back with both hands." He sat down again, and fixed a severe gaze upon Drexel. "By Gad! I can't make you out any more."

Roger Drexel leaned back in the easy chair he had taken, and returned his companion's gaze with interest.

"Listen, Ken. You know I was not exactly a model little boy, any more than yourself."

"Thanks."

"And then, as now, I was subject to strong enthusiasms. One of my enthusiasms was for the circus, from the spreading white canvas, the smiling and spangled performers and the affable ring-master, down to the merry clown and merrier donkey; I believed in them all. History, I believe, has not recorded the fact, and you may not, therefore, have heard of it. I am *confiding* in you now, Ken, putting my character into your house, as it were. When I was ten years old I ran away from home to follow a circus."

"No!—really?" Kenneth was smiling broadly now.

"I really did. And what I learned about circuses in two short months brought me to a state of disillusion which was at once sad and salutary."

"I should think so!"

"Yes; the white canvas grew dirtier every day; it was never clean to my eyes again. The performers, the riders, and leapers, and jugglers, and what not, were a lot of unhappy wretches. Some were martyrs, always in debt, always unloved; others were brutes, or worse. The smiles, and tinsel, and fleshings, were a mockery; their normal

state was drunkenness or sulks. The funny clown was the most profane and savage fellow it was ever my misfortune to meet. The genial manager was never genial outside the sawdust ring. Even the donkey was not—what he seemed."

Kenneth laughed outright; then something like sarcasm flashed into his face.

"Am I to make the application?" he asked. "You have joined the circus once more in your maturer boyhood, and, as before, I suppose, you have found things 'not what they seemed.' Well! How do you class *me*, as clown, or fleshing, or—donkey?"

"You may count yourself a 'fleshing,' if you will; but the donkey—I have reserved as symbolical of myself."

This time Kenneth's laugh was hilarious. All trace of sombre thought was gone.

"Upon my word, Drexel," he said, finally, "I can't think what you are driving at."

Drexel's face was very serious. "I'll tell you, Ken. That's what I'm here for: I want you to drop this thing."

"To—drop—it!"

"Yes; to stop where you are."

"To stop—before I've fairly begun?"

"Look here, Ken; listen to me. Three years ago I was an idiot. I called it enthusiasm then, of course. I was honest in my convictions; that's the only excuse I can offer myself for myself. I was abroad in Paris, in St. Petersburg, in Heidelberg, in Florence. Chance, or Fate, or—what you will, threw me among a lot of fiery eloquent fellows, enthusiasts like myself—reformers. Heavens! how eloquent they were! how serious. I believe they *were* serious—most of them. I became the comrade of a young Russian, who was as gifted as he of the golden tongue. You know what he preached, what they all preached, and what I believed. I came home, and must needs make a convert of you. We were to be the friends of the people, members of a brotherhood, a great power for good that was growing all over the world; that was to draw all mankind, all the oppressed, the down-trodden, the heavy-laden, together; we were to help the weak, to oppose the oppressor, to bring about a millennium of right, and justice, and freedom all over the world. And all this was to be done—how?"

The younger man leaned forward, his eyes aglow. He answered as if the speaker was expecting such answer—

"By the power of a mighty multitude, standing by one another as brothers, speaking with one voice against the crying wrongs of the age. By the mighty moral force of one man protected by the majority. By *reason* and right, and the force of truth against wrong and evil."

"Just so." Drexel's tone was cynical. "When I was found oppressing four hundred, or four thousand, labourers, miners, mechanics, or what not, the strong voice of all the enlightened labourers all around the world would roll forth 'Justice for our brothers,' and I, one of a small minority, with public opinion and the majority against me, must needs lose my clutch upon the throats of my four thousand, must give them

fair wages, fair profits, or whatever the great majority might dictate And so the world was to move forward, until one day all men should stand free and equal, all sharers in the soil, in the fruits of their labour, in the good things of the world, as it would be then. That is how it was to be?"

"That is how it *is* to be!" said Kenneth Hosmer.

CHAPTER XVI.

"NO COMMANDS."

DREXEL was silent a moment, then he got up and stood before his friend.

"We have not seen much of each other during the past year, Ken," he said, almost wistfully. "Tell me, do you really believe that?"

"Believe what?"

"That Utopian dream of yours—of ours. Do you believe that the brotherhood can or *will* do these things?"

"Yes."

"You truly believe that this enormous scheme of universal co-operation is practicable?"

"Yes."

"You think that the hour has struck—that the right man—the right *men* are at hand?"

Kenneth glanced away, as he moodily answered,

"I think that *one* of the right men has suddenly gone wrong, or threatens to."

"And you mean to go on, then?"

"How do you mean?"

"Don't you know how I mean? Are you going to move with the rest—to act with them?"

"To *act*. Well, I'm willing enough, but I don't see much chance for immediate action."

"Ken," Drexel came a step nearer, and his face softened as he looked down upon his friend, "tell me—since I left you, almost at the threshold of the society, what have you done? How much have you advanced? Have you been an active member, a regular attendant? or——"

Kenneth got up quickly, and walked to the nearest window. He was silent for a long moment, then he spoke without turning.

"For two months after you left New York, Drexel, I was a faithful neophyte. At the end of that time, Ginevra came back," his voice sounded husky. And Drexel started, and involuntarily moved a pace toward him.

"She had been away a year," Kenneth went on, "and for another two months all my time was given to *her*," he paused again.

"Yes," said Drexel, softly.

"Then came her illness—and—her death. You know how it all was. No, Drexel, for months I never so much as *thought* of the cause—of my brethren and their work; but, when I *did* think of them—" he turned and came back to his place, and dropped listlessly into it,

"when I did think of them, and go to them—it helped me to bear my burden—and to forget."

They were both silent for a little time, then Kenneth asked, still in his sombre tone,

"Drexel, have you wearied of the society?"

"Wearied! No."

"Why did you ask me to go to that meeting to-night?"

"Because I had heard you say that you had never attended one of those public demonstrations."

"Bah! what a coarse and common lot they were! And those orators! Did you know that the old man was to be one of them?" he looked up suddenly.

"No. That was not in my programme."

"I see, you wanted to show me the repulsive side. To weaken me. To shock my inherent aristocratic sensibilities—eh?"

Drexel uttered a short laugh. "If so, I did not succeed."

"No. But I don't know how it would have been, but for that fine old man, and his fiery eloquence; La Croix, was not that the name?"

"Yes."

"Well. The bombastic man, the man of adjectives, and the man of statistics, had rather dashed my enthusiasm, I confess. I was saying to myself, Mr. Kenneth Hosmer, there are your co-workers, your brother emancipators, how do you like them? And I *was* feeling a trifle lukewarm, what with having to hear them, and to see those unwashed men, and red-ribboned women. When that old man got up; when he sat down, and I had recovered from my share in the encore, I said, this meeting, these windy orators are but accidents in the onward march, they will be weeded out, or left behind. Only the worthy will go on to the end. Ah, that grand old man! He has helped me. Once more I feel that I have an object still in living. Drexel, you did me a good turn when you came home from abroad, and taught me the liberality of our creed; interested me in my fellow man, and his needs."

Drexel was silent.

"Come," persisted his friend, "this La Croix—who is he? Do you know him?"

"I? no."

"Well, then, don't you *want* to? Don't you admire him?"

"Yes. He is a powerful man. And—a dangerous one."

"Dangerous! That man—how?"

"Because he is an enthusiast and an idealist. He sees all that is best, loftiest, most splendidly daring, in socialism; and he cannot see, being the man he is, the evil and the danger, and the petty aims that may and must creep in."

"Drexel, what's come over you?"

"I'll tell you, Ken—I am seized with a hideous sense of my own moral responsibility. Of the harm I may have done, or may yet do. It was I who made you a socialist."

"Yes. You did me that good turn."

"Let's waive that, Kenneth. Will you do me one now?"

"I'll try."

"I'm going to ask a hard thing of you. I'm going to confess, too, that I *did* take you to-night, hoping to shock and disgust you. These meetings are not meant for *us*."

"That old man is for *us*. Is of us."

"Granted, Ken—I am going away."

"Again!"

"Yes. And I want to ask you to let this thing drop, not to meddle with it for a time, say—until we meet again."

"Drexel—what are you driving at?"

"Isn't it plain enough. I brought you into this thing, this socialism. And now I ask you, in the name of friendship, to stand where you are—to go no further for a time."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you why. You must take me upon faith."

"By Jove—but you ask a great deal!"

"I know it."

"Old man, I can't do it. I *can't*—I must go on. I feel as if there were nothing else left to me! Why do you want me to give this thing up?"

"I didn't ask you to give it up, only to hold aloof for the present."

"Do you mean not to go forward, not to attend——"

"Yes."

"I *can't*, Drexel," Kenneth arose again, and stood before his friend, "I can't, and I'll tell you why. I'm pledged to go forward. Since I first became an associate, I have remained at the threshold, but—I'm to take the second step to-morrow night. And after that——"

Drexel made a gesture that was almost despairing, and for a moment turned away his face.

"After that I shall have no more to say," he said, grimly.

Kenneth laid a hand upon his arm.

"Drexel," he said, "tell me; are you going back?"

A moment of silence; then, "No," said Drexel.

"Not? and yet you ask *me*——" Kenneth reddened and withdrew his hand.

"Let it pass, Ken. After to-morrow night, what we have said must be forgotten; you will not think of it again?"

"You *know* that; but, old man, if you are not going to forsake us, what *are* you going to do?"

"Since you won't come my way, I am going yours."

"Really—truly—then you will come up with me; you will join the second circle to-morrow, and we will go on together through the next and the next. Drexel, have you been quizzing me, after all? Will you come to-morrow——"

Drexel interrupted him by a gesture.

"No, Ken; that's out of the question."

"And why?"

"I'll tell you. I can't take the second step, because I have already taken it, and the *next*, and the *next*."

"What!" Kenneth Hosmer's face became deadly pale.

"You—are. Then you can——"

"Rest easy." Drexel put out his hand; the gesture was friendly

enough, but his face was gloomy. "I have asked a favour; I have no commands to give—not now."

And now the two young men stood confronting each other face to face. And two duellists would not have looked much different.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROGER DREXEL.

"WHO and what is Mr. Roger Drexel?"

It was Moina La Croix who asked this question, as she sat with Madeline Payne and Mrs. Ralston in Madeline's pretty little boudoir.

The two younger women had been driving, and Moina had been easily persuaded to return home with her friend. They had lunched together, and later, had received a call from Roger Drexel.

The call had been meant for Madeline, but she had seized the opportunity to make her friend Moina acquainted with the young man, whom she also counted her friend.

Mr. Drexel's call had been brief; he had frankly asked for an interview with Miss Payne, fixing the hour himself, and had been as frankly assured that she would be quite at his service.

Both Moina and Mrs. Ralston were present, and heard the request; but it was made and met with such simple directness that it caused not the faintest ripple of embarrassment, and he had found time to address a few courteous and pleasant phrases to the charming young stranger, as well as to Mrs. Ralston, with whom he was a favourite.

Indeed, he managed, without being observed by either of the ladies, to look more than once, and very intently, at Moina La Croix.

Moina had been several times the guest of Madeline, but, by some chance, she had never been presented to Mr. Lord; and Madeline had determined that on this occasion they should meet. While waiting for his return, the three ladies, after discussing many things, had arrived at a topic interesting in some degree to all.

"*Who* is Roger Drexel?" said Madeline, while Mrs. Ralston's usually serious face wore a half smile. "I'm delighted to tell you *who* he is, my dear. He is a young man of undeniably good birth and breeding; his antecedents are well-known and unexceptional. He has been—I have Mrs. Ralston's word for this—under the eye of society ever since he was a boy in jackets. His parents died abroad of some epidemic, while he was yet an infant, and he was reared by his grandparents, and has inherited a fortune, generally spoken of—again I quote Mrs. Ralston—as 'the Drexel millions.' Mr. Roger Drexel was, in his boyhood days, a pet of society, and is, in his young manhood, a social lion. His character is unexceptionable—ask Mrs. Ralston," and Madeline turned laughingly to her friend. She was in the best of spirits, and very glad that Moina had given her an opportunity to talk a little of Roger Drexel.

"Indeed, it is, my dear," said Mrs. Ralston, warmly. "*I* have known Roger from his childhood up. His father and his grandfather before him were grand men, and Roger grows more and more like

them. He has not been spoiled by unlimited petting in his younger days, nor by the homage paid him by society ever since he entered it. He has *inherited* uprightness of character, firmness, integrity, and courage. If he had not a dollar in the world, I believe he would be as popular, would have as many friends as he has now. He possesses the qualities that men—yes, and women, love—*there!*" and Mrs. Ralston, in her turn, smiled across at Madeline.

"Now, Moina," said Madeline, "you see what sort of a champion you will have if you manage to keep your present place in Mrs. Ralston's good graces; but, seriously, I believe Mr. Drexel to be all that she has painted him. And I have had the pleasure of knowing him quite well, although we have not met for two years, until since my return—our return from Europe. There's one odd thing to be said concerning so rich and altogether enviable a gentleman: Mr. Drexel has not a near relative in the world."

"Oh!" ejaculated Moina; "how *sad*, and yet—perhaps he is as well fitted by nature as most for a solitary life. Mr. Drexel impressed me as a very self-reliant man, a—what my father would call a *strong* man."

"He is all of that," said Mrs. Ralston, gravely.

But Madeline would not discuss Roger Drexel too seriously.

"Yes," she lightly assented, "he is all that. And now that you know *who* Mr. Drexel is, Moina, we come to the next clause of your question, *what* is he?"

"Oh, did I ask *that?*" laughed Moina.

"You did, indeed. And not for worlds would I miss this opportunity for easing my mind. Moina, Mr. Drexel is *a mystery*."

"Madeline!" remonstrated Mrs. Ralston.

"He *is*, Moina, a *mystery*, and nothing less. Fancy a young man who, after studying law, will not practise at the bar. And not because he is indolent, for he is a hard student, and learned in many things. It is not because he is wealthy, for I happen to know that he believes in a vocation for every one."

"I like *that!*" said Moina, quickly.

"So do I; but I'd like, too, to discover what vocation he has chosen for himself, and when he intends to let his light shine for the benefit of his friends."

"Do you mean——" began Moina, and then she checked herself.

"I don't mean that he has *not* a vocation," went on Madeline in the same light tone; "I only mean that it's not apparent. The truth is, Moina, our friend Mr. Drexel is a *rover*, here to-day and gone to-morrow. To-night he may call upon me, and in the morning, perhaps, the city which so much appreciates him may know him no more. When he goes, he seldom takes the trouble to bid his friends farewell; when he comes back his friends are not enlightened concerning his absences. To be sure, he may say, 'I have been abroad, I have been in Chicago, in New Orleans, in Greenland,' but that is all. Oh, yes, Mr. Drexel is certainly self-contained."

"Miss La Croix," said Mrs. Ralston, "if anyone else were to breathe a word against Roger Drexel, Madeline would be the first to come to his defence."

"But," said Moina ingenuously, "Madeline is not speaking *against* Mr. Drexel, she is only saying that she does not understand him."

"'You too, Brutus,'" quoted Madeline, and then the three broke into soft laughter.

But Madeline Payne's light words, calculated as they were to awaken in Moina something a little stronger than the ordinary interest or curiosity in the ordinary young man, were nevertheless quite true.

Having a vast fortune, he lived simply, making no ostentatious display. The owner of city mansions, huge business blocks, and a charming seaside cottage, he yet lived in rooms, or hotels, as the fancy or convenience of the moment dictated. With scores of friends who would have been glad and proud of his confidence, he confided in none. He had been a studious youth, and a brilliant career had been predicted for him in whatever profession he might choose. That he might not choose an active life had never occurred to any one. To be idle was not in the Drexel blood, and Roger was a true Drexel.

In school and at college he had proved himself a worthy son of his ancestors, and he had passed rapidly and brilliantly through all the stages of his law studies, had been admitted to the bar, had opened an office under most favourable conditions, and, in less than two months, had turned over his splendid law library to a worthy and needy friend in the profession, had closed his office and lef New York.

Reappearing nearly a year later, he had calmly assured his friends that he had turned his back upon the law. And this was as far as they ever got. His reasons, his intentions, present and future, he kept to himself. As Madeline had said, he was a law unto himself; he went without bidding society farewell, he came without giving warning, and coming or going, uncommunicative or otherwise, he was always welcomed, always regretted, for was he not Roger Drexel, handsome, talented, of flawless character, and, more than all—*rich?*"

Between Roger Drexel and Madeline Payne there had existed since their first acquaintance a sincere friendship, a mutual understanding that was perfect and of a rare sort. These two young people, each possessing a strong individuality, and each something of an enigma to friends and acquaintances, were not such riddles to each other. And even where mutual understanding ceased, mutual confidence remained.

When Moina La Croix had left her, after spending a pleasant half-hour in Mr. Lord's library, Madeline gave some thought to Roger Drexel and his expected call. She was sitting alone in her room, thinking with a serious face, when a servant brought her a message from Mr. Lord.

Would she come to him again in the library; it would greatly oblige him, and he would not detain her long.

There was yet an hour before dinner, and Madeline was very willing to spend it with Mr. Lord. She went down to him at once.

She found him pacing the room, a frown upon his face, and a fragment of yellow paper in his hand. As she entered and came directly to him, his eyes lighted up, and a half laugh broke from his lips.

"Ah—ha, my little counsellor, here you are. You see how I begin to lean upon you. It's because you take such a deep interest in me, of course."

"Of course," assented Madeline, with a smile.

"Well, come—sit down, and look at *this*." He pushed a chair towards her, and put the yellow paper into her hand, seating himself while she unfolded it and ran her eyes over the scanty page.

"Why, Mr. Lord," she exclaimed, "it's—*another*."

"Yes," assented he, grimly, "it *is*."

"And when ——" she stopped, and flushed slightly.

"Oh, don't be afraid to cross-question me, child," he said, now quite restored to amicability. "It's surprising how much comfort I get by letting you into this important secret correspondence of mine. It soothes my irritability in a wonderful way." Then, as if by an afterthought, "I hope it don't annoy you."

"Oh, no, indeed. I'm very glad of your confidence, Mr. Lord, although I fear I am not a very able counsellor. As a *repository*, merely, I think I may recommend myself."

"Now, look here, Miss Payne, you're perfectly satisfactory to *me*, both as a 'repository' and counsellor. Don't underrate your ability. Besides, I have been furnished *proof* of your wisdom and sagacity as an amateur detective. Gad"—looking across at her in a burst of affectionate enthusiasm—"if you *were* a detective, I'd turn this business right over to you. I almost wish I could!"

"So do I, Mr. Lord. If I were a man I would certainly follow my poor father's profession. I believe I might have done something at it."

"Umph! I should say you *had* done something at it; pardon the illusion, my dear. But about *this* business. We have in our house an expert in handwriting, composition, and the like. I submitted that other warning to him, and he agrees with you in every particular."

"Ah!"

"Yes. That the letter was written by a woman—and an educated one. You see, my faith in you rests upon a practical foundation."

Madeline looked down at the letter in her lap, and then across at its recipient.

"Mr. Lord—do these letters cause you any serious apprehension?"

The banker brought a hand down upon his knee with pleased emphasis. "There!" he said, "you have brought me squarely to the point. No, I can't say that they exactly cause me serious apprehension; but I'll tell you what I said to myself to-day. I said something like this. Elias Lord, you are a reasonably cautious man, I *hope*, and you can be reasonably cautious in this matter without being particularly alarmed, and in spite of a good deal of scepticism. You have been threatened, warned, or whatever you please to call it. *Probably* it will all end in smoke; but, possibly, it may not. Other men, your betters, perhaps, and quite as harmless, have been shot in the back, or struck in the ribs, by an assassin, and nobody seemed to know *why*.

It's the part of prudence for you to say to somebody, 'Look; some one is threatening to do me a mischief. If mischief *is* done me, *remember what I have told you.*'"

"Do you mean," began Madeline, slowly, "do you mean by that—that you constitute me——"

"I mean this," he broke in, hurriedly, "I have really no fear of this bug-a-boo; but I would be a fool not to give it a thought, knowing, as I must, having ears to hear and eyes to read the newspapers, that cranks are abroad in the land, and that their present craze is for assassination. I feel strong enough to outwit any *one* crank; but—if anything *should* happen, don't you see, and I, out of self-confidence, have suppressed these documents, I am defeating the ends of justice. I can't tell Mrs. Ralston of this."

"No," said Madeline, quickly, "you *must* not. It would make her a constant prey to her fears."

"Exactly. I can't confide in Mrs. Ralston, then, and, for reasons which you, being a clever young lady, may guess, I *won't* confide in my business partners."

Madeline very well understood the pride and obstinacy behind this statement, and she nodded and smiled as he went on.

"It is not every old fellow who is so lucky as to have a clear-headed young woman, with a natural instinct for affairs, among his friends, and under his own roof. I feel perfectly safe in your hands;" he leaned back in his chair, and smiled, grimly. "If anything mysterious happens to me, *you* will not go into hysterics; you won't faint, and come to and call for the police. You will set to work as—as *I* would in your place."

Madeline's face was very grave now. She was silent for some moments, while he seemed to be quietly enjoying her graceful intent pose, and the fine lines of her half-averted face. Suddenly she turned her clear, straightforward gaze full upon him.

"Mr. Lord," she said, earnestly, "if I were you, I would put this matter into the hands of a detective."

"Bless us!" he cried, "isn't that what I *have* done. Look here, Madeline," he got up suddenly, and all of his fine old-fashioned formality fell away from him in his earnestness. "I drop all question of ability, and make it one of inclination. *Hang* your professional detective, I don't want one within a hundred yards of me; they're worse than the reporters. *You're* detective enough for me. It's *born* in you. Honestly now, did I make a great blunder in coming to you with this nonsense. *Has* it annoyed you?"

"No, Mr. Lord. Don't think that for a moment."

"Well, then, has it grown monotonous? Have you had enough of it?"

"I appreciate your confidence, and if it pleases you to confide in me further, I beg of you to do so. I *am* interested."

"Now, listen. If harm should happen to me, would you then regret any knowledge of this business?"

"No," clear and straight came her answer now, "not if I might use my knowledge as I thought best."

"You may, I assure you."

"Then, Mr. Lord, do not hesitate to tell me whatever you choose." She took up the letter and read it again.

"It's not the same hand," she said.

"No, but its wording is almost identical with the first."

"Yes, *that* of course was intended."

"Yes, and for effect."

"Probably. May I ask how you received *this*."

"Not through the mail like the other. It appeared at the bank, one of the book-keepers picked it up on the floor ; it was folded—as you see—but not enclosed in an envelope, and it was addressed—look on the other side—conspicuously large, you see. Must have been tossed in at one of the clerk's windows during a rush."

"Yes."

A servant parted the heavy curtains that hung before the door of entrance.

"Mr. Drexel's compliments, and can he speak with Miss Payne at once," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW A LAWYER "SHUT UP SHOP."

ROGER DREXEL, the young man of fashion, the lion and favourite of society, the possessor of a fortune, who was commonly supposed to have nothing to do, and to be quite content to do nothing, was in truth a detective.

When he had been in his office as a fully fledged lawyer about two weeks, two cases were put into his hands. The first was the defence of a poor man accused of murdering his wife, and was thrown into his hands by a generous elderly brother practitioner, who looked upon it as "a dirty job with nothing in it." The second case was that of a young man who had been something of a figure in society for a year or two, who had held a position of trust and responsibility, and was now required to defend himself against a charge of forgery and embezzlement.

Beginning upon these two cases Roger Drexel had taken a novel course. Becoming interested in the supposed murderer he had put all his energies into the task, not of preparing a brilliant defence upon such evidence as was furnished him, but of convincing himself of the man's guilt or innocence. At the end of a week he found himself embarked upon as brilliant a piece of amateur detective work as ever was executed, and so charmed and fascinated by it that nothing could have drawn him back to his desk and his brief until he had seen the end. The case never came to trial. Instead of making a laborious defence, Drexel walked into the office of the police inspector one morning, asked for a private interview, and laid before him the results of his efforts as a detective, and within twenty-four hours the true murderer was dragged from his fancied security and lodged in a cell. A little later (for the law's delays are many), Drexel's accused and innocent client was set free, and the city police were credited with a splendid success; for Roger Drexel, tasting the first and sweetest

triumph of his life, had no notion of having a career of splendid and all-absorbing usefulness nipped in the bud by a lime-light burst of premature notoriety. True genius is confident. After this first test of his powers Drexel felt sure of himself. He had no moments of doubt or hesitation; like a flash his mind had been illumined, and he saw his own strength. He had doubted his career as a lawyer, and had never felt assured of achieving marked success. He had no doubt about this new career, it opened out before him plain, promising, alluring. He had hoped that he might in time become a good lawyer, he knew now that he could be, and would be, a successful detective. And he could be absolutely his own master in this new career. He would belong to no staff, work for no rewards, report to no chief, he would choose his own cases, and follow them up in his own way. He cared not a whit for glory, for the reputation of a great detective. When he had fully matured his plans he sought a second interview with the inspector, who believed in him thoroughly, and admired him without stint. An understanding that was satisfactory to both was easy under such conditions. Drexel could count upon the help of the police at need, and could turn over to them his finished work.

"The one thing that I must insist upon is my perfect incognito," he said. "If I were to become known as a detective half of my usefulness is gone. If I do anything you and your force must take the consequences of it—yes, and the rewards. I shall find *my* satisfaction in the work."

Having decided he was prompt to act. His first care was now to rid himself of his second client. This young man he had met in society before he became a social outlaw, and his client and his method of riddance was characteristic at least, if not entirely justified by the conditions.

Without opening his desk or allowing himself so much as a glance at the documents for the defence, so promptly furnished him by this client, Drexel locked his office, and for two weeks was seen no more as Roger Drexel in New York. At the end of that time he was again in his office, and sent at once for his client, who was beginning to fear that his interests were being neglected, and who came promptly.

Drexel began briskly.

"Good morning, Mr. Summers. I'm in something of a hurry this morning, and I want to ask one or two questions. Your bail, I believe, is furnished by a relative?"

Summers was a self-possessed fellow, but he paled slightly as he answered,

"Yes—by an aunt."

"Your nearest relative?"

"Yes."

"She is not wealthy, I am told. The loss of ten thousand dollars would cripple her seriously?"

"Yes."

Drexel jerked open a drawer of his desk and took from it a roll of bank notes, which he threw down before his astonished client.

"There is the amount of your bond," he said sternly. "Take it to your relative at once, explain it in your own way; only let her *under-*

stand that it makes good the amount she must lose through you. After that—I give you forty-eight hours' start."

Summers staggered to his feet.

"For God's sake," he cried, "*what* do you mean?"

"I mean this. I promised to save you from the penitentiary, but I didn't say *how* I'd do it. This is my way."

"But——"

"Don't argue. I haven't time to hear you. You're as guilty as the devil. I have *proof* enough to send you up for the extreme limit. By Jove, if I hadn't taken you for a client, I'd prosecute you."

Summers swore a round oath. "Mr. Drexel, for a beginning I must say this is anything but professional; it is——"

"Oh, I know what it *is* well enough. Look here, Summers, I won't defend such a scoundrel; I'll throw up my 'profession' sooner. It's what I mean to do. I won't spend the best years of my life pleading for scoundrels and fighting the laws that protect me. That ten thousand is merely a sop to my last professional instinct. A sort of mass for an expiring lawyer, strangled at his birth. I don't offer you any sympathy. I haven't an atom of it for you; you're a thief and a forger—yes, and a libertine to boot. You did it all cleverly—I'll say that for you. Now you would better go; it's only because you put your case into my hands that I give you this chance. Now go; I want to take down my shingle and shut up shop. And, mind you, don't take that money with you. If it is not in your aunt's hands before noon *you* will be in hotter water than you've been in yet."

And that is how Roger Drexel, attorney-at-law, retired from business.

"I'd rather be a common policeman," he muttered to himself, as he locked his door for the last time and literally took down his shingle. "I wonder why I ever went into it. Bah! To be applauded in the newspapers for being able to make black look white, for being a bigger or a better liar than my brethren. I'm not the man for it." And then, as he strode away, he added, with a grim smile, "At any rate, I've furnished gossip with a tit bit or two. They may dissect Summers, and then they can dissect *me*. They won't be likely to connect his exit with mine."

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All this had happened two years before Roger Drexel appears to us in the light of a friendly missionary to the condemned murderer of old Jacob Traill.

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CHAPTER XIX.

A SPY.

ROGER DREXEL, while he passed for an idler, a time killer, was in reality the busiest of men. He had called upon Madeline, and asked for an interview that evening with a purpose; and he had, being a quick and keen observer, at once recognized Moina La Croix as the young woman he had seen at a socialist meeting not long before.

That they should meet thus impressed him as a trifle odd, and he meant, at some time of greater leisure, to ask Madeline about her lovely young friend ; for Madeline had presented Moina, not formally, but as one friend to another, and in the introductory ceremony Drexel had paid more heed to the face and bearing of Moina than to the rapidly-spoken name.

"She was very beautiful," he had said to himself, "and with a peculiar charm of manner ;" but then he had said this to himself, before. Drexel was ready to do homage to beauty, but he was not susceptible. More than this, his mind was filled with other and graver things. He was always courteous ; he had not time, he assured himself, to do the gallant. So he made his appointment with Madeline, and soon took himself away.

But his preoccupied thoughts were soon brought back to Moina La Croix.

He had driven to the door in a hansom ; and as he ran down the stately steps to his waiting vehicle, his observant eye noted the squat and uncouth figure of a man who was sneaking past the house, and casting furtive glances up at the great windows. He had seen this queer figure before, and at once recognized it, and the lingering face and furtive glances aroused his suspicion. Crossing the pavement, he engaged in a moment's parley with his driver, entering the cab at last, just as the man he had so suddenly determined to watch slunk out of sight around the nearest corner.

"Drive north, slowly, turn, and stop," said Drexel, coolly, and in a moment he too was out of sight around the corner opposite that behind which the spy was lurking. Here he promptly dismissed the wondering driver, and prepared to follow the man, who, never dreaming that he was watched, soon reappeared opposite the house of Mr. Lord, resuming his slow gait and furtive *espionage*.

Without quitting his station near the corner, close to an elaborate iron paling, where a clump of shubbery afforded him a very sufficient screen, Drexel beckoned a passing newsboy and sent him for another cab, which he entered at once, and, directing the driver through the slide at the back as they went, drove boldly past the spy and a little way down the street, where he halted the cab.

After a few moments of waiting, he saw Miss Payne's fair visitor come tripping down the steps, and was not much surprised when the spy, after allowing her to pass him, which he did without a glance, crossed to the opposite side of the street, and began to hurry after her, keeping not far in the rear.

"Turn," said Drexel, "do you see that little man in the butternut clothes ? well—*follow him*."

"All right, sir," said the sophisticated driver. And then for some time they drove slowly on. Drexel, with his eye now upon Moina as she walked with a quick, springing step down the noble street, and now upon the spy, who ambled along with graceless agility, quite unlike his previous shamble, and looked woefully out of place against the brilliant perspective of flowers and trees, and stately houses.

"Evidently," said Drexel to himself, "he is following that young lady—but why ?"

A few moments later, he was not so sure of this. For when she had walked several blocks, Moina stopped, and after a moment's hesitation, as if not quite at home in the locality, crossed over, turned down a side street, and approached a cabstand.

Seeing this, the butternut-clad spy halted at the street corner, watched the girl as she entered a cab, and until she had driven away, then he turned and pursued his journey, going still on foot, and at a very leisurely pace, in the direction taken by Moina's cab, but not upon the same street.

"He certainly *was* following that girl," mused Drexel, now. "And why has he abandoned the chase so easily? Perhaps he *knows* where she is going with that cab, or perhaps he has not a fare in his pocket."

He stopped his own cab now, and, dismissing it, followed the spy on foot. It was a very leisurely chase. The spy seemed in no haste. He also seemed to know just where he was going; and, presently, Drexel was forced to abandon the theory that the spy could not ride because of an empty purse.

When they were within half a dozen blocks of the house occupied by the La Croix, the man walked coolly into a florist's, and Drexel, from a position just outside the window, saw him buy a bunch of violets and feathery ferns, pay for them with a careless air, receive them in a neat pasteboard box, and stop at a desk near the entrance to write something upon the outside. Then he came out, and set off at a faster pace.

A few moments later the two came to a halt. The spy, just two doors from the house which Drexel knew to be the house of "La Croix the Socialist," as he mentally named him, and Drexel himself nearly opposite, where he loitered carelessly. The spy moved slowly now, and seemed to be seeking to assure himself that he had found the right number. He passed the house of La Croix, walking slowly, and looking up at the windows, then he retraced his steps, and after a little more hesitation, went up to the door and rang the bell. At the same moment, a fleecy curtain that was gently fluttering at an open window of the second floor, was drawn back, and Roger Drexel saw, with a start of surprise, a girl's face looking out, and down the street. It was the face of Moina La Croix. And she yet wore her hat and mantle, as he had seen her last.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon him.

"That was the name!" he said to himself. "La Croix was the name! I wonder if she can be that old man's daughter?"

Moina was gone from the window in a moment, and she had not glanced across the street. Drexel now turned his attention back to the spy upon the doorstep. A servant had opened the door. He could guess that a question was asked and answered in the affirmative, and then the box was passed over to the servant, and the bearer turned away, going slowly until he had reached the street corner, where he paused to look back.

Drexel, who was still his shadow, looked back also. And then for a moment he forgot the man he was following in the surprise of the moment.

A carriage driven rapidly from an opposite direction had stopped

before the door of the La Croix house, and three men sprang out, one after the other, as if in haste.

The first man was Rufus Crashaw, whom Drexel recognized, having seen him more than once. The second man was slender and handsome, and he knew him, too, as the escort of Moina on the night of the socialist meeting. The third, he knew only too well. It was his friend, Kenneth Hosmer.

"Already!" muttered Drexel. "Confound their enterprise!"

As the three ascended the steps, Kenneth and the handsome stranger going first, Mr. Crashaw paused a moment, with his face turned towards the man in the butternut clothes, and Drexel clearly saw a signal exchanged between the two.

In another moment the three last arrivals had been admitted. "As if they were expected," Drexel thought. And then the butternut man dived down the cross street, and our detective hurried after him.

"At least, my butternut friend, I'll see where *you* burrow," he muttered.

But the butternut man made straight for the nearest saloon, and began to enjoy himself like one whose day's work is done.

After loitering in the vicinity for half an hour, and assuring himself that the spy was really off duty, Drexel noted the name and number of the little basement saloon, and then taking the first hansom at hand, was driven back to Mr. Lord's, where he rang with haste, and asked to see Miss Payne at once.

CHAPTER XX.

MADELINE'S FIRST ERROR.

WHEN Madeline came hastening into the little reception-room, she found Drexel waiting for her at the very door, hat in hand.

"You will pardon my importunity, Miss Payne," he began, "when you know all my reasons. And I must ask you to wait for a full explanation until I find more leisure. Since I left you this afternoon, I have *found* an imperative reason for being in a much worse place than your drawing-room this evening. Believe me, it's duty, not pleasure, that compels me to ask your indulgence."

"Which, reduced to simple English, means, Miss Payne, you must forego the pleasure of my company this evening," broke in Madeline, lightly.

"It means that I must be deprived of the pleasure of yours," he said. "And I very much regret it. I was coming to ask a favour of you, Miss Payne. To try, in fact, to drag you into a conspiracy."

Madeline started, but she only said—

"You are playing cruelly upon my curiosity."

"I *meant* to enlist your enthusiastic interest. And in a very delicate matter," he said, gravely. "And now that must wait. Just now, I have only time to ask a few questions, and to beg you to believe that my motive for asking them is a good one."

Madeline simply bowed.

"May I proceed?"

"Yes."

"What is the name of *your* friend whom I met here to-day?"

"Did you not understand. Her name is Moina La Croix."

"Do you know her well?"

"Yes, I think so." If Madeline felt surprise at these questions. her face did not express it.

"And do you know her people?"

"I have met her father, who is, I believe, her only living relative."

"And who is a tall, white-haired old man, stately and picturesque. A foreigner."

"I see that you know the La Croix."

"I will tell you how well I know them, and why I am questioning you in this manner. But first I must ask you to regard all that I now say as a confidence."

"If you intend to tell me anything concerning Miss La Croix—anything which she ought to know," began Madeline—and then she added, suddenly, "but, go on, Mr. Drexel, you have my promise."

It was the sudden gleam of his fine eye that brought out these last words. It was as if he had said, "Do not forget that I am a gentleman."

"Some time ago," he began, "I chanced to be in a crowd, at the close of a public gathering, and very near to a lady and gentleman who were embarrassed by the crowd. I helped a little to make their exit easier. I did not catch the name, as you introduced your friend to-day, but I recognized her as the young lady of that occasion. I also chanced to notice a rather unsavoury-looking fellow in that crowd, simply because he *was* so ugly and crafty of aspect. I must make my story short, Miss Payne. Upon leaving here to-day, I chanced to see this same fellow, and knew that he was *watching this house.*"

The colour suddenly forsook Madeline's face, and he noted this with some surprise, as he hurried on.

"I, in turn, watched *him*, and saw him follow your friend Miss La Croix *to her home.*"

Madeline drew a sudden breath of relief.

"Oh," she said, "curiosity, probably. Moina is a distinguished-looking person, with a decidedly foreign air."

"I think it was more than that."

"Really? possibly an admirer, then."

"A squat, elderly man, dirty and shabby. A most villainous-looking fellow, and, like your friend, *with a decidedly foreign air.*"

Madeline looked annoyed.

"Do you really attach so much importance to this, Mr. Drexel?" she asked.

"I do. And I hoped that you would tell me anything that you could about Miss La Croix, and her parent; she seemed to me a delicate, sensitive girl. And, because she is your friend, I felt that I could not let her run the risk of any sort of annoyance. I have omitted one item. This man, this spy who followed your friend, was loitering near her house when a carriage drove up, and three men entered the house. *I saw the spy exchange signals with one of these men.*"

Madeline, who, until now, had remained standing, like her guest, seated herself, and sighed heavily.

"This troubles me," she said, and then she turned upon him suddenly.

"This man who signalled your spy," she asked, quickly, "describe him, please."

"A man of low stature, square build, heavy features, reddish-brown whiskers, short and thick, covering half his face; well dressed; looks like an Englishman. Ah, I see you recognize him."

"I believe that I do. Sit down, Mr. Drexel, and let me thank you for your kindly interest in my friend. Yes, I think I see it all now. And I owe it to you to explain."

And she told him of her meeting with Moina La Croix on board the *Calypso*, of their voyage, and the growth of their acquaintance.

"Her father is an artist," she concluded, "and is, I fancy, more than a little eccentric; I believe there have been some sad pages in his life, and that the loss of his wife when Moina was an infant, was a heavy blow to him. Moina, I have lately learned, is an heiress, her inheritance coming from her mother's side, and being very securely tied up for Moina's benefit. But wait—I have not explained—about this spy and his confederate. On board the *Calypso* was an Englishman, who was presented by the captain to Mrs. Ralston, Miss La Croix, and myself. His name was Crashaw, and we failed, he and I, to discover the least affinity for each other. I fancy that he was attracted by Moina from the first, and soon observed that when he was not actually in conversation with her or in the group about her, he was watching her, more or less, openly. I discovered, too, without being told, that Moina was annoyed by his attentions. He cultivated her father's acquaintance, and seemed to get on better with him. I suppose he has followed them up, and has set a spy upon Moina for fear the lions of New York may devour her. Seriously, she ought to know of this. May I tell her?"

"I beg that you will not. It will make me look qnite as much a meddler as this fellow Crashaw. If it's only a case of jealousy, it's clearly out of our province. Do not speak of this to your friend; at least, not yet. And now I must go. May I see you to-morrow, instead of this evening?"

"Yes, at what hour?"

"Early; say at eleven o'clock. By the way, how is our friend Mr. Lord? I have not seen him since we dined together at the Girard's."

"Really?"

"Even so. And since then he has become——"

"What?" asked Madeline, with sudden eagerness.

"It has just occurred to me that perhaps I ought not to forestall Mr. Lord; but it is not a secret, I suppose. He has been made President of the R. M. P.'s." He laughed lightly. But Madeline's face was grave.

"Mr. Drexel, is there really such a society?"

"Well, it isn't really called the '*Rich Man's Protective*,'" he replied, "although it might very well be. Yes, there really is such a

society; and it is strong in its bank account if not in numbers. Some of our great merchants, bankers, and manufacturers have organized for the protection of their business and their property. Perhaps, after all, it is none too soon."

When Drexel had gone, Madeline sat down and mused with a troubled face. Not of Moina La Croix and her follower, although she had determined, while listening to Drexel, to find some way of dropping a hint to her friend. The matter looked quite simple to her. Crashaw had been held at arm's length, and learning in some way that Moina had found companions of her own age and sex—congenial companions; he had set a watch upon her, lest she should find an admirer or lover as well. It was not strange that any man with a heart in his own keeping, and eyes to see, should fall in love with Moina La Croix.

It had flashed upon Madeline, too, that Roger Drexel was, perhaps, unconsciously bestowing unusual thought upon her sweet friend. Well—and Madeline sighed a little sadly—it would be very suitable, and they would look a royal pair.

Dismissing the spy from her mind with these thoughts, Madeline pondered over the last words that Drexel had uttered in seeming carelessness.

She knew how bitter Mr. Lord could be when aroused by the discussion of strikes, trade's unions, socialism, etc. She had heard something of this projected organization of capital in its own defence. The objects of this new order she believed to be protective, and, if need be, aggressive; she had heard its possibilities discussed more than once. It was to bring together a great fund to be used for the protection of its members and their interest.

If such a society had really sprung into being, it was because there was, or seemed to be, a reason for its existence. And if Mr. Lord was one of its promoters—its officers, was he not, more or less, openly arrayed against the trade's unions, strikers, and socialists?

Viewed in the light of this new discovery, the two anonymous letters took on new significance—yes, and Mr. Lord's confidences too, stood forth in a stronger light. His reasons for choosing *her* as a counsellor became more apparent.

Thinking of these things, Moina La Croix was, for the time, forgotten. And Madeline set her lips in firm lines, and paced the floor, studying this new problem.

Elias Lord had not trusted this beautiful, courageous, disciplined Madeline without good reason.

Years before, a certain Lionel Payne had made for himself a record as a detective, brilliant, if brief. He died a martyr to his profession in the first years of his success, otherwise the world would have known him and given him high rank among the detectives, who bring to their work as much of genius as ever Mozart put into music, Rubens or Titian into their art, or Webster or Cicero into oratory. This Lionel Payne was the father of Madeline, and Madeline was her father's child: his in face, and voice, and manner; his in courage, sagacity, cleverness, and rapidity of thought. Once in her life, while she stood at its very threshold, fateful circumstances had combined to

test these qualities in her, and she had been equal to the emergency. Fatherless and motherless, she had stood up single handed against strong enemies, and had come off conqueror—conqueror of her enemies and over herself. Never, at his bravest and strongest, had Lionel Payne, the detective, showed himself braver and stronger than had Madeline Payne, the detective's daughter, in her time of trial and danger.

She had conquered her fortunes and herself, and now safely anchored, self-reliant and happy, Madeline was a friend to be trusted, and to be ready in time of need.

"I must know," she said to herself, "I must know first of all how long this society has been in contemplation, when it was actually organized, and how soon after his elevation to office these letters came to Mr. Lord."

Meanwhile, Roger Drexel was communing with himself after another fashion.

"If it had been a man," he mused, "I should not have hesitated; but I have no right to shake her confidence in her friend—at least, not yet. I would give something, though, to be *sure* that Miss Madeline Payne would meet my confidence half way; and then, after a few moments of silent cogitation, he broke out, "strange, how that girl, and her queer surroundings, has put all thought of Lord, and his possible danger, out of my head!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A RUSSIAN PRINCESS.

ROGER DREXEL was early astir on the morning that followed his adventure with the spy. He was looking forward to the hour upon which to call upon Madeline. He meant to go full early and so be secure from interruption. But, alas, for our best laid plans. While it was yet too early for a morning call, he received a summons from the Chief of Police. It was imperative, and he went at once, in the same cab that had brought the messenger.

He found Captain B—— in his outer office and alone.

The relations between the two men were most friendly, and the first thing that impressed Drexel was a certain constraint in the captain's manner, not in his greeting. That was most cordial, and he thanked Drexel heartily for his prompt coming. Then he uttered a hasty apology, and went out, leaving Drexel alone for a few moments.

"We will go into my den," he said, reappearing with some haste; "we'll be safer from interruption there."

When they were seated in the "den," the captain began at once, and the same constraint was manifest—to Drexel—as at first.

"I don't know what you'll think of the case I've got to propound to you, Drexel," he said; "in fact, I can't say much as to the prospects for success or failure, or of the ins and outs of the matter itself. I'm only a medium to bring together—say client and detective."

"Well!" Drexel was not paying very close heed to the captain. He was sitting in an easy attitude, in a position to command three

sides of the small "den," and from time to time, as the captain talked, he glanced carelessly about him.

"Last evening," went on the captain, "a lady came to me and asked me to name to her the *best* detective in the city. She told me plainly that she did not want a member of my own force. She must have a man who was answerable to no one, a man who could give all his time, if it was months or *years*, to her service, her cause. Money was no object; she was prepared to spend a fortune in the search she was about to institute."

"Well?" said Drexel again.

"Well—that's about all. The lady asked me to name to her the best detective in the city. This, of course, I could not do without your permission. I *think* it's the sort of work for you. The lady is a foreigner, has crossed the ocean, she tells me, to prosecute this search. It is a vital matter to her; she wants to put the case before you herself. She made two stipulations in asking me to bring about a meeting."

"Yes?"

The captain shifted in his chair nervously, and looked hard at Drexel, who was provokingly cool and indifferent in manner. There was a brief silence, during which the detective got up and went to look at a picture which hung on the opposite wall of the rather luxuriously furnished sanctum.

"New thing, isn't it?" he asked, as he came back to his seat. "Well, go on about the stipulations."

"One was simply that I should bring her into communication with the *best* detective, and no other; and the other one—" he paused a moment, and then laughed, "the detective must be *absolutely* above suspicion of being *a socialist*."

"Oh, and so you consider *me* above suspicion?" said Drexel, ironically.

"Of being a socialist—yes. You may be a very reckless fellow, but you're not *that* sort of a madman at least."

"Thank you," said Drexel curtly, and then he got up and stood erect before Captain B——.

"I'm sorry to see you so embarrassed, captain, although I do not wonder at it. And with all due respect to the wishes and caprices of a lady, I must insist that this interview terminate *at once*, or that we continue it *without a witness*." He pointed his remark by a glance toward a tall screen which stood across one corner and directly before a door.

Captain B—— got up too, flushing hotly; but before he could speak, one panel of the screen was swung back, and a vision all dark silk and lace, luminous eyes, glowing cheeks, dainty, graceful, lovely, self-poised, a trifle haughty, and altogether fearless, swept out from behind it and swiftly confronted Drexel.

"Do not accuse your friend the *commissionaire* of a plot so bungling that *you* could see through it at once, sir. He *said* you would be sure to discover me. I did not *care;* I wanted to see your face, to hear your voice, before I and my case were presented, monsieur." She turned swiftly.

"This," said the captain, now quite himself again, "is the lady whom I told you of." He turned a look of inquiry upon the dainty figure before him.

"If monsieur will hear me," she began, turning toward Drexel a face of earnest appeal, "if he will *hear* what it is that I wish——"

Drexel bowed, and the captain, glad to find his share in the interview so easily over, made haste to leave them together.

As the door closed behind him, Roger Drexel, with a courtly bow, placed a chair for the lady, and standing before her, gravely awaited her pleasure.

"Before I tell you my story," she said, quietly, "I must ask your promise that, however our interview may end, you will keep all that I say to you as secret as the grave. Monsieur, the Chief of Police, assures me that your word is to be relied upon."

He bowed.

"As yet, sir, I do not know how to address you."

"In private life I am known by one name, in my professional life by another; as a detective I am called Hurst. Will that suffice?"

She bowed with a touch of haughtiness.

"It is as a detective that I seek to know you, sir. I, in my own country, Russia, am known as the Princess Orloff. Here I shall be merely Sacha Orloff. I am here to seek one who is very dear to me. One who, I believe, has been foully betrayed. It is not a light thing that I ask you to do. And it may be you will have to contend with organized enemies, strong, powerful, dangerous. I am not seeking a living man, monsieur; I dare not hope to find him living. I am seeking to unravel the mystery of his fate. To know who have been his betrayers, his jailors, his executioners. Only show me *how* he died, and by whose hand, and the rest. The *rest*—ah!—I shall know how to *finish* the work."

She shut her lips tightly, and her eyes gleamed, while her cheeks paled.

Drexel was observing her with thoughtful interest.

And Sacha Orloff, princess, or not, was deserving of much observation. She was childishly *petite*, and as dark as a Spanish donna, with features not strictly regular, but glowing and delicate, and tropically beautiful. The eyes were large, dark, and shadowed by long, thick lashes; the mouth a curious bow, with the whitest of tiny teeth peeping out as she talked; a perfect olive complexion, with plenty of rich colour coming and going in the cheeks.

A bewildering face it was, changing with every mood, and always charming in its changes. She was very graceful in gait and gesture, with a certain odd little effort of stateliness, in spite of her dainty smallness. The little feet and hands were as shapely as if modelled by an artist, and her voice was low and softly full. She spoke with a pretty foreign inflection, and, perhaps, it was this that caused Drexel to think of Moina La Croix, and to make a swift mental comparison.

Beside this girl, Moina's willowy form would have seemed tall, and her rare face pale, perhaps; but Moina's hair was as dark as Sacha's, and her eyes—he was mentally saying that he had never before realized how very different two pair of beautiful dark eyes could be.

And he might have gone on to further comparison, if Sacha Orloff had not broken in upon his random thinking. She had been silent for some moments.

"Monsieur, the Chief of Police, has spoken of you in such glowing terms, Monsieur Hurst, that I, on my side, am quite ready to trust my hopes with you If you will accept—if you will undertake the work: I know it is hard; it looks almost hopeless. But they say that a detective, a *true detective*, can do—miracles; that no doors are closed against him. And I exact nothing. Time, money, all that can help you, shall be yours to command. Monsieur—what is your answer?"

"Mademoiselle Orloff," said Drexel, smilingly, "you have not told me enough. I cannot decide upon so vague an understanding."

"But, if you accept, I am here to tell you *all*—everything!" She spoke eagerly, and as if she hardly believed that he had not already accepted.

"Before I decide I must hear all that you can tell me. And should, probably, ask a good many questions. If I am satisfied, and decide to serve you, very good. If not; all that you may have said to me will be as if it had not been spoken."

All this he said with his eyes upon her face. And there he saw, first, disappointment—evidently this young woman was accustomed to having her will—then, rising anger, promptly suppressed, and swiftly replaced by a new look, a look of winning beseeching softness and deprecation.

Again there was a moment of silence, and Drexel said to himself,

"She is clever, and capable of being dangerously charming; she may be good or evil, true or false; she can love and hate with intensity; she has courage and resolution; she may be anything and everything else, but she is *not* weak. Such women are saints or sinners from *choice*. They are not the puppets of circumstances."

When she spoke again, it was as one who asks a favour.

"Will you hear my story now, Monsieur—Hurst?"

"If you wish it."

"We are safe from interruption here, I know," she said. "The *commissionaire*—I believe you call him the *chief*—has assured me that we might converse here, securely."

"There is no safe or better place for such a consultation."

"That is what *he* said. Now, I will begin. My father was Ivan Dreischoff, a Russian officer to the Czar. My mother died when I was very young, and I was consigned by my father to the care of a good woman, one Madam Petrolowski, a widow, whose husband had also been a soldier of Russia. Madam Petrolowski had one child, a son. We were of nearly the same age, and grew up together as brother and sister. When Basil Petrolowski was eighteen, he went from home to study, and, not long after, Prince Orloff came to Odessa, to visit some estates in that vicinity. Prince Orloff had been, it was said, in some sort, a patron and benefactor of Paul Petrolowski, the father of Basil, and he professed an interest in the son. He came to see Madam, and he saw *me*. He came again and again. Then my father, who had not visited me for two years, came one day and told me that he had promised me in marriage to Prince Orloff—the Prince

was sixty, and I was sixteen. Perhaps you know how we are dealt with in Russia. I was married to Prince Orloff, and my father soon after was elevated to a place in the royal palace : this by the favour of Prince Orloff. Monsieur, I will not dwell upon this time. We soon came to live a part of each year upon the great estate near Odessa, and, after nearly three years, Basil Petrolowski came home. We met often, and resumed our friendly relations. I had never given up my good second mother, and I went often to her house. Monsieur, I charge myself with the ruin of Basil Petrolowski. Not intentionally, the dear mother knows. We had been as brother and sister so long, how could I tell that the Prince would be jealous ; but it was so. He was furiously jealous : and we quite unconscious of it all. There is not much more to tell, monsieur. One day Basil was missing ; search was made, of course ; many things were said. He never came back. We never saw him again ; but once—months after, the Prince, who was a wine-drinker, and would say anything vile when he was filled with wine—let me know that Basil had been gotten away because of *me*, '*Removed*,' he said ; and he said that I would never see him *alive* again. Six months ago the Prince died ; he had found no more occasion for jealousy, and he was good enough to say that I had been very kind to him during a long illness, so he left me his fortune." Up to this time she had told her story in a quiet, suppressed manner, almost as if she were reciting some very dull details, necessary to be known; now, she arose, and stood erect before him.

"He left me his fortune," she resumed, her face kindling to a fierce glow, "and I intend to make it help me to find Basil Petrolowski, *alive or dead!*"

CHAPTER XXII.

HER MISSION.

FOR a moment she stood thus, her eyes meeting his full, then she turned and resumed her seat.

"Well," she said, impatiently. "Well, monsieur?"

Drexel smiled and held his peace.

"What do you think? Can you help me?"

"If I have understood the Princess Orloff, this Basil Petrolowski disappeared from Odessa. How comes it that she is searching for him *here?*"

She started, and a ghastly pallor overspread her face; her emotion might have seemed to some stronger than the occasion warranted.

It proved to Drexel that her previous quiet, and that imperious air of taking his assistance for granted, had been assumed, and well assumed.

"I forgot to tell you that I received a few words, scrawled in what I believe was Basil's own writing ; a letter—it came—months after he had disappeared, and—it came *from America.*"

"And those few words?"

"Simply a farewell for all time."

"And you have that letter?"

"No," she was quite self-possessed once more. "I dared not keep it. I was Prince Orloff's wife, and he would have looked upon it as confirmation of his hideous suspicions had it been found in my possession; I dared not keep it, I was surrounded by spies."

"You recall the date of the letter, no doubt?"

"It bore no date. It had the appearance of having been written and, perhaps, carried about for some time. The wrapper which enclosed it was much the fresher."

"Ah! and that wrapper—you have destroyed that too, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, I *kept* that. I will tell you how. I took it to Basil's mother and asked her to keep it for me, she trusted me, and asked no questions."

"But did she not recognize the handwriting?"

"No. The letter was addressed by another than Basil, or else he had disguised his hand very cleverly. It did not arouse a thought of Basil."

"You can show me this envelope?"

"At the right time, assuredly."

"Could you decipher the post mark?"

"No."

"How long since you received that letter?"

"It was last November."

"And how long since he disappeared from Odessa?"

"That was more than a year ago."

"Prince Orloff, you tell me, stated that this young man had been 'removed,' and you believe that the Prince had a hand in this removal?"

"Ah—did I *say* that?"

"In words, no. By implication, yes."

"Well, I will not say it. Prince Orloff was my husband."

"You have some suspicion or theory, no doubt?"

"It may be for me to suspect—it is for you to theorize."

"Very good. You of course understand that if I take this case I must have a much fuller account of all that you have told me in outline, we deal in minutiæ, and must be the judges of what questions are pertinent, and must be answered. A bit of knowledge withheld by you for scruples of any sort, might necessitate for me a journey to Russia."

"To *Russia!*" once again she was startled out of her calm, but only for a moment, "but, monsieur, *your* work is *here*."

"We will not enter into that now. Will you tell me why you stipulated for a detective who is *not* a socialist?"

If he had expected to startle her again he did not succeed, she answered readily,

"If you were a Russian you would not ask that question; your socialists and our nihilists, I suppose, are much the same, and the nihilists are bound body and soul to their cause. A nihilist is not his own master, he might be called at any time from my work to that of his order. For this work I want a man who *owns* himself. Do not misunderstand me, monsieur. My heart is in sympathy with the oppressed people of Russia, although I am the daughter of one of

their oppressors, and the widow of another; I think you must understand me?"

There was a charming appeal in these last words, but Drexel simply bowed his acknowledgment.

"As for further information, fuller details," she went on, "I am ready to furnish them—to tell you anything that may help you, when you have decided—if you have not already decided, to serve me."

"I have *not* decided;" he arose abruptly, and took up his hat. "I cannot decide to-day, perhaps not for several days. I have other matters that must be put into shape before I can undertake such an investigation as this promises to be. If you are unwilling to wait —or——"

"No, monsieur, I will wait—if I must."

"Then if you will tell me where to call upon you, I will undertake to give you my answer within the week, perhaps in four or five days."

"Thank you, Monsieur Hurst," her manner was now one of charming gravity, straightforward, business-like; "you are very good." She gave him the name of a splendid up-town hotel, and added:

"I am here, of course, with a chaperon; we are registered as the Princess Orloff, *and daughter Sacha*," and she smiled up at him as if confident that he understood.

"Then it is the chaperon for whom I must inquire as the Princess," he asked.

"Precisely. I see that you understand," and so they parted.

Roger Drexel left the office of Captain B—— only to return ten minutes later by another entrance.

"I thought you would come back," was the captain's greeting.

"Yes," said Drexel, in a preoccupied manner. "Is your Little Norton in town, captain?"

"Yes. Do you want him?"

"Him or another of the same sort. I want a man sent to the 'Oriental,' where my charming possible client is staying. Let him remain there and keep an eye on all her movements until further orders. By her movements I mean, of course, those of her chaperon, her servants; he must report all that concerns her."

"Ah, I see."

"Let him report *here*, every day, and in writing. Can you tell me anything about that boy Toole?"

"I can give you his address, or send for him, Do you want him, too?"

"Yes. Send for him. And send him straight to me, or—no—keep him here until I come or send for him, I've got a busy day before me."

"Good again, anything else? not, well then try a cigar. What do you think of the lovely Russian?"

"I will tell you," said Drexel, as he lighted his weed, "when I have formed an opinion."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOSMER FINDS AN OCCUPATION.

WHEN Roger Drexel entered a cab after leaving Captain B——'s office for the second time, he was in an unpleasant frame of mind. He had much to think of without this obtrusive affair of "Mademoiselle Sacha Orloff's," he told himself; much that was important, of vital interest, perhaps, to himself, and to others; and yet—it was Sacha Orloff, and his recent interview with her, that would keep uppermost in his mind, in spite of his efforts to put the lovely Russian and her interests in their proper place upon his list of affairs.

But it was *not* as Sacha Orloff, the distressed beauty, searching the world over for a lost friend—possibly a more than friend—that she occupied his thoughts. If he could have seen in her no more than this, he might have put her out of his mind the more easily. She appeared to him in a far more dangerous light, and her presence in New York, he thought, might have a more personal meaning. Sacha Orloff, he had already decided, was neither artless nor unsophisticated: she was a beautiful and dangerous woman. And thinking thus, he drew out his little note-book, in which no record remained after it had served its purpose, and wrote upon a fresh leaf—

"MEM.—*To learn when S—— O—— came to N. Y., and all possible connected with said arrival.*"

"MEM.—*Telegraph to Bologsy at Paris concerning S—— O——.*"

Then he began to think of Madeline, but not to the exclusion of Sacha Orloff. Somehow this fair Russian, of whose existence he was unconscious only two hours ago, made herself a part of every new subject for reflection. He meant to see Madeline, and it was now late enough for his morning call; but since that interview in Captain B——'s office, all his plans appeared disarranged, he seemed suddenly to have found new and arduous duties.

He drove to a telegraph office, and scribbled a message to M. Bologsy at Paris—

"*Inquire for me, viâ St. Petersburg, concerning one Prince Vladimir Orloff and family, some time residents at Odessa.*

"DREXEL."

Next he sent a messenger in search of Kenneth Hosmer, with a note as follows:—

"DEAR KEN,—*If possible*, be in your rooms at *one o'clock. Business is important.* "ROGER."

This done, he drove to Mr. Lord's up-town mansion, and sent up his name to Miss Payne. It was Mrs. Ralston who came to him in the reception-room.

"Madeline had been called away quite early in the day," she told him. "Little Phil Vaughan had been taken ill in the night, and Mrs. Girard had sent for her. Phil was feverish and bordering upon delirium, and he had called so persistently for 'Aunt Madeline' that

Mrs. Girard had begged her to come. Mrs. Ralston had just received a message from them: Phil was growing worse, and Madeline would not leave him yet. She had asked that Mrs. Ralston explain to Mr. Drexel and make her excuses."

"Perhaps there's fate in it," mused the detective as he drove away. "Perhaps I am growing unnecessarily alarmed and—concerned—in other people's affairs. Perhaps I ought not to confide such grave matters to a woman, even if I *do* know her to be brave and capable. After all, *am* I my brother's keeper to *the* extent—to *any* extent—my brother's keeper?" Then his brow clouded, and he moved his shoulders impatiently. "Pshaw! 'No man liveth for himself,' says the Book of books. Shall I see my neighbour drifting upon a reef, and not warn him? Having eyes, is it not my duty to see for myself—and for others?" He shut his lips firmly together as if he were facing some strong opposing force. "I have put my hand to this thing," he muttered, "and I won't turn back. I must have help, and there are only two who *can* help. Madeline Payne fails me, then—*Jove!*"

An open carriage had passed him so swiftly that he only caught a fleeting glimpse of its occupants; but in that glimpse he had seen two women, recognized one, and caught vaguely the features of the third and last member of the party—a man, and young. Had he seen that third face before? It seemed to him that he had. He was sure enough of the Princess Sacha, and presumed the elderly woman beside her to be the chaperon. And their male escort?—*was* it a familiar face, or only a chance resemblance? And, if so, to whom?

Promptly at the time appointed he stood in Kenneth Hosmer's cheery apartments, holding his friend's hand and looking as if the world had no perplexities that could withstand his keen insight, no tasks beyond his strength.

"I didn't look for you quite so soon," said Ken, as he drew his visitor toward a comfortable seat beside a low table.

"In fact, I'm just here myself. It's lucky you sent straight to the club."

"Oh, I know your habits, Ken," said Drexel, dropping into the luxurious seat. "I'm glad you got the thing without any more ado, for my sake, and for the sake of that messenger, who might be going yet."

"I should think so! I counted half-a-dozen addresses on the card he held, all in your dear, familiar handwriting. Well, old man, what is it? Something awfully urgent, I should fancy."

"Well—yes," said Drexel slowly. "At least it's important—more or less, as the result shall prove. I've come in *two* capacities, Ken."

"Eh!"

"Which means that it's willy-nilly for you. I might *ask* you to do me a favour, and you might refuse. In that case, you know, it would be confounded awkward to rise up in my dignity and lay official commands upon your youthful shoulders."

"Never mind my youthful shoulders, old man." Ken, like many another young fellow, did not relish the term "youthful," while its application was so manifestly appropriate. "I think I catch your meaning; so fire away, *ask* or *command*——ahem!

"I want you to do a little more masquerading, Ken; and it will be a more serious job than merely to visit a lecture-hall and sit in the audience a couple of hours. You used to be pretty good at amateur theatricals?"

"Well!"

"Well, I want you to play a part—two or three parts perhaps."

"What in the name of—wonder, are you driving at, Drexel?"

"Just this: we have in this city numberless societies that claim to be with us, of us, in a vague and general way. Well, the command has come now to try our brethren, to see of what metal they are made. I'm afraid the amount of sounding brass, the great number of tinkling cymbals, will astonish some of our honest investigators."

"Couldn't you be a little more—a—lucid?"

"I can and I will; I have here"—and he drew a small packet from his breast pocket as he spoke—"among other things, a *list*, several lists in fact, of names of various secret societies that claim relationship, or *wish* to claim it, with—*ours*. Under each society's name you find the names of its officers and its most active and prominent members; we have added the name of their hall for organized meetings, *and* of the various places most affected by each society as place of social rendezvous. I regret to say that these rendezvous are for the most part—saloons."

"Um—I dare say," commented Kenneth, still looking mystified.

"It is thought important at this stage of events," went on Drexel gravely, "that the depth and power of these enthusiasts be sounded—not after the popular method, *not* by acclamation, by 'motions made and seconded,' by resolutions in conclave—but *by individual expression*. It is desirable to know how far these men will go, if actual work begins—and *in what direction*."

"Do you expect to make a personal canvass?" asked Kenneth, derisively.

"Something like that." Drexel's tone was matter-of-fact now, and graver than before. He was not *asking*, he was—commanding. "For instance, here"—opening one of the papers in his hand—"The society whose name you will find at the head of this document has its rendezvous, or one of them, at the sample room of one Chris Olim. Well, you are to attire yourself as a tar, a rough, a tramp—assume *any* character that you can live up to for a few days and nights, and make one of Chris Olim's patrons. Become acquainted with Mr. Olim's leagued *habitués*, make yourself known as one of them, learn their aims, their interests; what they expect the brotherhood to do for them—what they will do for the brotherhood."

"By Jove!" began Kenneth excitedly; but Drexel, with eyes fixed upon his friend's face, and with a stern look about the fine mouth and firm jaw, went on without heeding the interjection.

"It is desirable that we know what these multitudinous societies will be worth to us when the time comes for action, and it is coming. We want to know *how* they interpret that word '*action*.' If there should be a great lockout ordered, for instance, will these fellows fall into line, stand shoulder to shoulder, earnestly, honestly, soberly—

keeping the peace, abiding by the treaty that their leaders will seek to make for their welfare, obeying their superiors, encouraging the weak brethren, discouraging and opposing all disposition toward riotous outbreak?"

"Of course they will," broke in Kenneth; "that's the object of our——"

"We want to know *how many* will do this. We want to know who are *in earnest*. We want to know, also, who will take another view of the meaning of the signal to act. How many are waiting for an opportunity to riot and pillage, to rob their employers, to idle and drink during the strike, if it comes, upon the funds of the society; who will swell the drunken, maudlin mobs that are a disgrace to organized protective societies. Who will make of these societies a cloak for viciousness, brutality, laziness, and ruffianism. These things can be learned in only one way. We must go among them, see them, hear them, test their courage, learn what they hope for—what they believe. Are you ready to undertake it?" There was no friendly ring in the tone—no lightness. A set face and firm, low voice—eyes that met his fairly. Kenneth was grave enough now.

"Is this—an *order*, Drexel?"

The other nodded. They were both silent for a moment, then—

"Don't you feel equal to it?" asked Drexel slowly.

The words stung Kenneth Hosmer, as more biting words could not have done.

"*Equal* to it!" he repeated, throwing back his head. "Yes, why not? It comes rather unexpectedly, that's all. When am I—how much time——"

"Oh, you have a week," said the other. And then his tone changed. It was grave enough still, but more friendly. "It is not pleasant work, Kenneth, I know, whereof I speak; I've been engaged in it long enough to know."

Hosmer started and stared at his friend.

"You!"

"Yes; and because of this I can, I think, be of some use to you in your beginning. I don't know that it's very dangerous, but yet there's a certain risk in it. Some of these saloons are pretty low places, and they're visited by some rough characters—the very worst, in fact. Your greatest risk will lie in the danger of your being suspected—as being in disguise—and that sort of thing. You'll need a steady nerve—that's the most."

"Well," said Ken, with a return to his natural coolness, "I hope my *nerve* won't be found wanting; and, as for my muscles," he held out the arm of an athlete, felt it judiciously, and nodded, "I think they are in their usual trim."

"Oh, you've all the necessary courage, and more than the average muscle for a man of your size. If you don't find your surroundings too malodorous for your fastidious taste—I fancy you'll get interested in the business. It won't last very long, I dare say."

"Am I to report?" asked Kenneth, suddenly.

"To me? yes."

"And you will cry 'enough' at the proper time?"

"Yes."

Young Hosmer passed his hand across his hair, and looked thoughtful.

"Well," he said, after a time, "I've been waiting for something new—and exciting; probably this is a dispensation in my favour," then he leaned suddenly forward, and bent a searching gaze upon his friend.

"Drexel," he asked, "when you tried to persuade me to draw back—or to stop where I was—the other night, did you have *this* in your mind?"

"What 'this' do you mean?"

"This new understanding—this job of mine."

"No," said Drexel.

"Roger, I wish you would tell me *why* you did that?"

Again, as on that other night, Drexel arose, and stood before him.

"I *will* tell you, Ken, and then we will bury this subject. It is not fit that we discuss it after this. We have been friends for years. You have been to me what a younger brother might have been, if I had a brother. I have been watching the workings of the *cause* here and elsewhere; watching it, and studying the signs of the times; and I see that a change is coming. I won't say it will be a change for the better. I must not say it will be for the worse. In such a cause as this, there will naturally be certain restless spirits who cannot wait. All over the land this uneasiness has been growing. In some places, large strikes, that have held on like sieges; in others, cut wages, because of failures in that line or this. Sometimes it is the greed of corporations that bring the pinching times; sometimes it is only the natural instinct of self-preservation, overplus of supply lessening demand. The past two years have been full of disasters to all classes, and those most vitally affected are bound to be the working people. All around us, a variety of causes have wrought powerfully to bring about a single result. I wonder if you know how much the cause has gained within the past two or three years? not so much in membership, although it has almost doubled numerically. I mean in strength; in actual lever power. That doctrine of amalgamation has done it. The agents who have been working everywhere, advocating a few simple principles as worthy to be adopted by all, and *getting* them adopted, not only by our own society, and its nearest of kin, but by other leagues all over the land—it's *this* that has brought about the present stage of development. Sometimes," here his tone became a shade more sombre, "I fancy it may prove another Doctor Ox's experiment; that the seeds we have planted and watered, and cultivated so vigorously, may grow like the strawberry, too big to swallow comfortably."

"Well," said Kenneth, grimly, "we don't *want* to be swallowed comfortably."

"Perhaps you will happen to remember," said Drexel, significantly, "that the vine became luxuriant beyond the expectation of the pruner. That the experiment went beyond his control, and blew up the city."

And now, as on a previous occasion, Kenneth got up, and the two stood face to face.

"Drexel," he said, "I see that you've been at work while I have been dreaming. In practical things you have gone beyond me—and I thought you were growing lukewarm. Be frank with me, old man. You *did* want to keep me out of this; tell me, was it for my sake —because you feared for *me* personally—or," he laughed good humouredly, "was it because, in a time when wisdom and skill, clear heads and steady hands are needed, you found—that I might prove a bungler?"

Roger Drexel raised his right hand, and let it fall upon Kenneth's shoulder; the gesture was an unusual one from him, and equivalent, almost, to a caress.

"When you have accomplished your mission, Ken, you will be qualified to answer your own questions—perhaps. As for your skill, or the fear that you might bungle, remember that bunglers are not the sort we want, *or choose*, for such work as you are about to undertake. And remember, too, that this will not be just a 'gay masquerade;' the man who begins well *here* will be sent to other cities—it may be a long enlistment for you."

"So much the better."

"Well, since you feel like that, you will, I am sure, waive this question of motives. When our work is done, we will have a clearing up—if it is necessary, then. Now," and he withdrew the caressing hand, "I have only a little more time to give you. Shall we talk of your disguise? and the best way to begin? perhaps I can give you a hint or two out of my own experience."

"It's a bargain, Roger," said the other, "shake. I'd be awfully glad if we might strike out together!"

"We can't exactly do that, I'm afraid; but I'll be likely to run in upon you now and then."

And so the two shook hands heartily, and sat amicably down to their discussion of minutiæ.

A little later, Drexel was hastening again toward police headquarters, his eyes very grave, his thoughts busy.

"If we wait, and listen," he mused, as he went, there comes an answer to all our questionings. "My brother's keeper! Yes, I *am* my brother's keeper!" And then he added, gently, "Poor Ken, it's a hard page that he is about to turn. I wonder if the day will come when he will reproach me with it. But there seemed no other way. And—it's better than the alternative. *Better*, heavens, yes! It's the difference between Paradise and Hades."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ABOUT THE R. M. P. U.

MILES LA CROIX stood in his studio before an unfinished picture, palette and brush in hand. He wore an artist's gown of clinging black, after the picturesque foreign fashion, and no study from life among all that hung about his walls, or looked out from their places upon floor or easel, presented a finer natural pose, a more stately air, than did this old man with flowing white hair and beard and

statuesque draperies. There was a flush upon his cheek, and a light in his fine eyes that was not natural, so Moina declared to Savorin, and to no other, but that were nearly always there of late.

The house they had taken was one of the tall narrow-fronted sort most common to certain streets. And after some rearrangement and experimenting, the studio had been settled upon the ground floor, with a tiny breakfast-room in the rear, and with the apartment between converted into a reception-room of a rather exceptional and private nature. Upstairs were the drawing-room, a tiny dining-room, and another, again at the rear, which Moina called "the study," and where Miles La Croix received those whose business with him was most urgent or intimate.

It was a small establishment, obviously not intended for much receiving, much dining and wining; but it was not wanting in luxuries, and the evidences of a correct and dainty taste were everywhere.

Here in the studio were artistic draperies, half concealing here a picture, there a bit of statuary or bronze bas relief. It was not lumbered with bric-a-brac, not the studio of an amateur, the workshop of a *dilettante;* Miles La Croix was a figure painter, and a skilful one. If he had chosen art as his mistress his name might have gone down in the book of fame as a rare and successful portrayer of "the human face and form divine." But he had chosen a harder task-mistress, and his name was destined to go down to posterity after another and a sadder fashion.

The artist was standing before his easel; he was not painting, neither was he looking at the second occupant of the room. But he was listening, and the flush on his cheek deepened when, as the other ceased speaking, he turned quickly, tossed his palette and brushes down upon a low stool near the easel, and clasped his slim white hands behind him.

"It's useless to discuss this, Crashaw," he said, setting his thin lips together firmly. "I have given myself to the cause, I have *not* given my daughter. Yes, I admit that it was, at first, my intention; that I meant to leave her as, in some sort, a ward to the league. We have talked of this, she and I, and we understand each other. My daughter is in sympathy with our work, and her sympathy will not lessen. You and I know what it is to bind a woman to this work by all the oaths, to set her face to face with all the penalties. *We* have been in Russia."

"We are not in Russia now."

"We know no more where we may be three months from now than yonder smoke knows whither it is flying. I repeat, Crashaw, my daughter shall not dispose of her future, shall not risk her happiness *in any* manner, until she has seen at least one more year of life, until she is better fitted to choose. I know all her courage, all her enthusiasm, all her capability for self-sacrifice. Moina will be her own mistress—a year hence." He unclasped his hands, and, biting nervously at his thin lips, turned again and took up his palette.

"Confound it, La Croix," broke out Crashaw in his nearest approach to lightness of manner, "you are jumping too far;" and to

himself he added, "*as usual.*" He caught up his soft dark felt hat from the rug at his side and began to emphasize his remarks by slow movements up and down with the hat crushed together between his two big white hands. It was a gesture habitual with the man. "Crashaw can only talk at his ease when he has something in or between those great palms of his," Savorin was used to say of him. "You mistake my meaning entirely. Of course, I admit that I would be glad to have Miss Moina with us heart and soul. We need such women as she will be by and by; but I agree with you there is time enough. What I fear is the influence that will be brought to bear upon her in the meantime."

"The influence! *What* influence?"

"That of her associates. Look here, La Croix, *you* live in the clouds, you don't look closely at trifles; but trifles sometimes——" he made an upward movement with the compressed hat. "Miss La Croix has found some friends of late who are not—well—not of our sort."

La Croix suddenly faced him again.

"I suppose you mean Miss Payne and her friends?"

"I mean Miss Payne and her friends."

"Miss Payne is a lady, and a most charming one. Mrs. Ralston is above comment from you or me. What do you know about the others that *I* do not know? The Girards, for instance?"

"What do *you* know of them?"

"Not much; but all in their favour. They have called upon us here. Mrs. Girard is a lovely woman. I feel that I ought to thank providence for such friends and companions for my daughter; and I *know* that she is worthy of them. Girard," here he turned back to his easel, "is a man I should like to know better. He is not one of the natural tyrants—the men who wring blood from labour. It only wants the right conditions to make him one of us."

He was painting now with light careless touches, and he did not see the sneer upon the square plain face of the man behind him.

"Have you ever heard of Mr. Elias Lord?" Crashaw's voice was singularly keen and cold now, and La Croix slowly lowered his brush, half turned, and then stood still, a look of perplexity creeping into his face.

"It sounds—familiar," he said, slowly. "It sounds—familiar."

"Your memory *is* a little treacherous, La Croix. Mr. Elias Lord is the man whose roof shelters your daughter's friends, Mrs. Ralston and Miss Madeline Payne."

The old man drew a breath of relief, and turned again to his canvas.

"Surely," he murmured, as if he were talking to himself, "surely. I *am* forgetful. Miss Madeline's host, of course."

"And your daughter's host quite frequently of late."

"Yes," absently.

"But Mr. Lord is something more than a distributer of hospitality to ladies," went on the cold keen voice; 'Mr. Lord is the president, one of the originators and most liberal givers of the R. M. P. U."

"What!" The dark robe swirled round the tall form as the artist wheeled suddenly upon his visitor. "What?" he said again; "what is—this?"

"It is the gist of the whole matter; it is the business that brought me here to-day. Elias Lord, the banker, the owner of many stocks, railway shares, a silent partner in two or more large factories, where two thousand men and women are toiling and starving, earning dollars for him, and *receiving* cents: Elias Lord, the projector of the scheme whereby two or three hundred men, some here, some in other cities, have always at their command—*always*, mind you, at the command of *these few*—more money, more millions than all our labour leagues, all our societies throughout the length and breadth of this broad land, and all over England—yes, *Europe*—can control. He is at the head of a body of men, every one of whom controls, in some capacity, the work—yes, and the *lives* almost, of hundreds of men. Every member of this grand order must be an employer by the wholesale; no man owning less than five hundred of these white slaves, may be *admitted*. And these men are banded together for *protection*. An enormous fund is being employed to fee *spies*—hirelings; they watch the factories and workshops, and report the disaffected and the grumblers. They make lists of league and union men, and black-list suspected socialists, nihilists, and anarchists. Their emissaries are all over the country, studying the strength of unions and working-men's societies; investigating their methods, worming into their secret intentions, and—if they fancy their interests threatened, vast sums are ready to help them, *politically*, mind you! to help them to laws for their further 'protection,' for the further oppression of the poor. Oh!—but it's a grand scheme! These three or four hundred men, with their millions, and with the political machinery of the country in their own control, stand ready to give the signal to crush out the last spark of life from the *millions* of human souls who have only *hundreds* of dollars, perhaps not so much."

Crashaw uttered all this in his usual tone of quiet and biting sarcasm, and this very manner served to make its meaning more apparent.

The old man's face flushed hotly. Then he seemed to restrain himself with an effort.

"And what has this to do with my daughter?"

"What! Is not your daughter growing daily more friendly with this man? more intimate in his household? Can *you* go hob-a-nob with this king of the poor?"

"Yes. If I will."

"*Will* you, then? or will you let your daughter go again and again where you yourself would not set foot? Honestly, La Croix, I am your friend, and the sincere friend of Miss Moina. I speak for her good—and for yours. It might become very awkward, under certain circumstances, to have an inmate of that house upon a friendly footing in this; I have not been here long, but I have made the most of my time. Do you know who this Miss Payne is?"

"An orphan, I believe, of good birth."

"Bah!—bah! people are not *born* in this republican country; they

are manufactured—at the mint—those who are rich. The others—mere ciphers; they only exist."

Miles La Croix turned again to his easel; he was more disturbed by what Crashaw had said than he was willing to admit—to Crashaw. He meant to question Moina at the first opportunity; but he looked upon Crashaw's interest as being personal rather than patriotic, and was determined to do or say nothing to encourage the latter. He had given his own life to a cause that he believed good, but he would not allow this man to identify Moina with himself, or to urge her young enthusiasm further, especially now that he believed he had fathomed his motive.

For a few moments he painted in silence and with nervous vigour, while Crashaw swung his hat up and down, now and then crushing it quickly between his hands, at the same time biting his underlip, and letting his lashes droop and conceal his small cold penetrating eyes for an instant.

Presently the artist paused, and turned his head.

"Crashaw, do you believe in this thing?"

"In what thing?"

"This banding together of the millionaires—for what they are pleased to call 'self-protection.'"

"A man must believe a self-evident fact."

"And do you think this organization is perfect?"

"In what way?"

"In all its internal arrangements. Is their machinery strong? will they stand together? Will not these magnates, each so powerful, so ponderous in his own might, decline to be led?—and how can they all lead?"

"My dear friend, your ideas of these men are too foreign—too Russian. These are not magnates made in a day, in a breath, by the Czar, or some other petty potentate. They have made themselves, and they can't be *unmade*, like a Russian prince or general, in a day—in a breath. They are American citizens, with plenty of hard-headed, practical keenness; plenty of thought—for themselves. Yes, they will stand together, shoulder to shoulder, like the rank and file, when their rights or their might, or money are threatened. Money-kings, that is the only title *they* covet; and they will stand for *that, like* money-kings. Oh! there's only one way to deal with them."

"And that?"

Crashaw shrugged his shoulders, and made a significant gesture. "*Some* of the Russian practices will bear transplanting," he said, with meaning.

CHAPTER XXV.

DREXEL'S PERPLEXITIES.

In spite of the fact that he much desired to see Madeline Payne, and that he considered their coming interview, or its outcome, of importance to himself and others, Roger Drexel did not find the opportunity he sought for days.

At first it was little Phil's illness that kept Madeline at or near his bedside. Once, indeed, Drexel called at the Girard villa and asked to see Madeline; but she was in the sick room, and the fever was at its worst: she could not, or would not, leave her little friend. Then for several days Roger found himself too much occupied to think even of his errand to Madeline, and so a week wore away and a part of the second.

As soon as could have been expected, he received the reply to his message to Bologsy, the Paris detective, who was at all times in direct communication with the Russian capital through a brother, the youngest of three Bologsys, all skilful detectives, and all, more or less, in political favour; one in Paris, one in Vienna, and one, the youngest and most reckless, in St. Petersburg.

The message informed him that one Prince Vladimir Orloff had lived at Odessa and died there some months ago; that his wife, a beautiful woman, and the daughter, "*it is said*," of a Russian officer, high in favour, inherits his wealth, which is enormous, *conditionally;* and that this same Princess Orloff was now abroad, travelling for her health, or pleasure, or both.

People who use the cable acquire a habit of condensing words and phrases. All this was briefly conveyed by M. Bologsy of Paris, and Drexel was assured that he would find M. Bologsy of St. Petersburg his to command in case of need.

Acting upon this hint, he at once put himself in communication with M. Bologsy of St. Petersburg, asking of him information as follows: Would M. Bologsy furnish him with a minute description of Madam the Princess Orloff? Would he obtain for him a brief and *accurate* account of the lady, her life previous to her marriage and since, her standing in Odessa and at the Russian court? Would he give the name of her father, the favourite of a Czar; and explain the meaning of that phrase beginning "*it is said*—she is the daughter," etc. What were the *conditions* of the late Prince Orloff's will? And last—What could he tell him of one Madam Petrolowski, of Odessa, of her family—*and* her past?

It will be observed that he asked no questions concerning Basil Petrolowski; that he did not so much as name him. As he penned the last words, Roger Drexel smiled grimly.

"Perhaps, after all, Madam la Princess, I shall not be obliged to go to Russia," he murmured. "*Viva* the three Bologsys!"

At the end of five days he called upon the Princess Orloff, and being conducted to a most luxuriant suite of apartments, was not surprised to see a tall and slender old figure half rise from a low chair. It was a wan face that looked out from a frame of soft hair silvery white, and twined about the small and finely-formed head coil upon coil. The dark eyes must have been dazzlingly beautiful once; they were pathetically beautiful now. The hand that rested upon the arm of her chair, half supporting her, was white and slender—a patrician hand, thought Drexel.

"This is—Monsieur Hurst?" she asked, in a low, tremulous voice; and then, as Drexel bowed, she added: "You are expected," and sinking back into the chair, waved a dismissal to the servant.

When the man had gone, she sat for a moment regarding him silently; then she arose and took a step toward him.

"M. Hurst," she said, with strong traces of agitation in her voice and manner, "I have heard much of you from my child Sacha; all, indeed, that she could tell me. She believes in you, and now—so do I. Let me beg of you that you give us your help. My—my daughter is so anxious—it is for her sake——"

She stopped suddenly: a gorgeous *portière* just opposite her was swept aside, and Sacha Orloff, a vision of oriental loveliness, in one of those trailing, flowing "confections" called—the saints only know why—a "tea-gown," swept into the room, and paused midway, almost between them.

"I thought," she began, with her eyes upon the lady; then, "Ah! it is M. Hurst. M. Hurst, let me present you to my mother, Madam La Princess Orloff."

"Madam La Princess" bowed low to "M. Hurst," and coming nearer to the younger Princess, murmured a few words in a Russian dialect which Drexel did not understand. The eyes of the two women met, and then "Madam La Princess" moved toward the *portière*.

"M. Hurst's business is with you, Ulia," she said in a louder tone. "I will retire."

She swept past him with a stately bow; but he could see that she walked feebly, and that the hand which put back the curtain was tremulous. Then Sacha Orloff turned again to Drexel.

"My mother is an invalid," she said, "and very nervous. She is deeply interested in the cause which brings me to this country—and to you. You have decided, M. Hurst?"

"I have decided to serve you—yes."

She swept up to him with a swift movement, her face glowing, her rich robes gleaming and rustling softly, a subtle perfume exhaling as they swayed to her movement and settled softly about her when she stood still before him, and held out her hand.

"You can hardly guess what that means to me," letting the soft hand rest in his a moment and withdrawing it slowly.

"I feel as if the burden was already slipping from my weak shoulders."

Her approach, her tone, her gesture, all savoured of personal friendliness, an equality recognized, and Roger Drexel was a citizen of the world.

"And settled upon mine," he added.

She moved back apace, and scrutinized his fine figure with a pretty air of unconsciousness.

"Your shoulders are very broad," she said, "I think they are capable. Besides—shall I tell you what the chief—the commissionaire—which is right?"

"Either will serve."

"Shall I repeat what he told me?"

"Not necessarily. Captain B—— is instructed to use all his eloquence in recommending me to the ladies. But I'm afraid you underrate your own abilities. Your shoulders are *not* huge—but I do not think they are *weak*."

"No," she said, meeting his gaze with sudden frankness, "they are *not* weak. If I were very weak, or cowardly, I should not have undertaken *this*."

"Nor I," said Drexel, and for just an instant their eyes met in something like a subtle challenge.

Then she turned swiftly, and seated herself, motioning him to sit also. But he only changed his position so as to face her once more.

"Not now," he said. "My errand to-day is simply to tell you that I will begin this quest for your missing friend very soon, and that to-morrow I hope to see you again; to talk with you at length."

"At what hour?" she asked, with no shade of disappointment in her face.

"Unfortunately, I cannot name the hour," he said. "If I may call at my earliest leisure."

She lifted her head a trifle, and her tone was icily haughty.

"It appears, then, that, having entered my service, you are *not*, after all, giving me your *time*."

"That," he said, with unmoved countenance, "is quite a different matter. I give my time unreservedly to no one. Captain B—— should have told you that."

"Possibly, he did," she said, with regal indifference.

"I have said that I would use my best efforts to find your friend, or information concerning him. I promise no one more than that. And I must warn you, now, that I shall not lay down other work to devote myself exclusively to yours; and that I have in my hands other matters quite as important as is this of yours. Perhaps we ought to have understood each other better. If so, Madam La Princess, permit me to withdraw my acceptance, and leave you free to choose an assistant who can give you all his time."

She had turned toward him again, and a momentary look of amusement now played over her face, where no trace of haughtiness lingered.

"You are very—princely," she said, with a little bow. "But I cannot accept your withdrawal. And, since you cannot name an hour to-morrow," she paused, and seemed to ponder a moment. "No," she said, shaking her head, "I cannot receive you to-morrow, not at all. I am occupied; the day after to-morrow I will receive you."

"The day after to-morrow," he replied, "I shall not be in the city."

"Then it seems that your *other* interests are *more* important than this."

"And the other interests of Madam La Princess?" he bowed, ironically.

An angry light leapt into her eyes. She lowered her lids quickly, and then uttered a short laugh, and said,

"I have no other *interests!* I have only—engagements."

"And my other interests are engagements also." He moved toward the door. "Shall it be, then—in three days?" he asked.

"Since it must be. But I dislike the delay." They had both fallen into a matter-of-fact tone now.

"And I deplore it," he said. "Until then, Madam La Princess,"

he bowed low, and before she could utter a word, was out of her presence.

In the corridor of the hotel coming in, as he was going out, he met a young man, handsome, jaunty, humming a foreign air; as they passed, each glanced quickly and keenly at the other.

"Superb man," was the mental comment of Rene Savorin, as he went his way. "Finest-looking man I've seen in New York, in America. Ah—these Americans."

"Handsome fellow," thought Drexel, as he passed out. "Why, yes, to be sure!" as it all came to him in a flash of recollections, "it's the fellow I saw at the socialists' meeting *with Miss La Croix*. It's the fellow who took Ken Hosmer to the La Croix studio. *It's the face I saw in the carriage of Madam La Princess!*"

Then the thought came, naturally—was he going now to call upon her? Probably—why not? Perhaps he lived at this same hotel. He was a foreigner, also.

"I wonder when *he* came over?" muttered Drexel, with a grim smile.

He stood for a moment just outside the stately hotel, looking up and down with the well-bred idler's air, then he fastened a button of a perfectly-fitting glove, and moved forward a step or two. He did not seem to be looking in any particular direction, but Roger Drexel's eyes were kept up to their limit of usefulness; they were trained to *see*.

He walked on a few paces with slow step and listless manner, and he noted every movement of a little man across the street—a little man, conspicuous for nothing in particular, unless it might have been for his particularly harmless and insignificant look; he was not attired in butternut clothes to-day, but wore, instead, garments of that peculiarly dirty hue that is neither black, brown, nor grey, and that helps so much to make our business and working masculine humanity look as if in dingy undress uniform. The man was not a notable feature upon Fifth Avenue; but Drexel had seen him, and as he sauntered on, he muttered,

"Ah! my friend, the spy, again. What does he here? And what, and where, and *who*, is the link between monsieur, the spy, and Miss or Mr., or both the La Croix?"

The spy was walking slowly past the great hotel, and Drexel lingered long enough to see that at the corner he turned and retraced his steps.

"It *is* the house he is watching," he mused, stopping meanwhile to light a cigar, and then, as he sauntered on, "Fortunate that I had the fellow shadowed," he added, and walked on, smoking, and apparently quite the gentleman of leisure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF A DINNER PARTY.

ON the morning after his call upon Sacha Orloff, Drexel sent a note to Madeline Payne, asking if he might wait upon her that evening, and he bade his messenger wait for an answer.

It came promptly, and opening it hastily, Drexel read :—

"DEAR MR. DREXEL,—Your note is most *apropos;* come to us this evening by all means. We dine early, a small party, and shall count upon you. There will be Mr. and Miss Girard, Dr. Vaughan, Mr. and Mrs. Follingsbee, and—I *hope*—my friend, Miss La Croix. We will be sure to find time for our long-deferred conference, if that is the proper term, after dinner, if you can give us the evening.

"MADELINE PAYNE."

"At last," murmured Drexel with a smile ; "fortune comes to those who wait. What an odd dinner party, and yet *not* odd. Follingsbee is Lord's very best friend, the Girards and Vaughan are quite at home there, and Miss La Croix, the socialist's daughter, is Miss Payne's latest enthusiasm." He sent another note, assuring Miss Payne that she might depend upon him.

It had been arranged that Moina, if she came, should come early, and this she did.

None of the other guests had arrived, and she went straight to Madeline's boudoir, where that young lady, arrayed like a lily of the field, sat alone.

"Oh, Moina," she said, at once springing up to welcome her guest, "I'm very glad you are come. I began to fear that you would not, after receiving your note, and then who would poor Mr. Drexel have taken in to dinner?"

"Miss Payne," suggested Moina lightly as she removed her wrap. "So you are to have Mr. Drexel?"

"Yes, quite unexpectedly. Why, Moina! how charming!" She fell back a pace and scrutinized her guest with uplifted hands and unfeigned admiration. "How very lovely."

Moina was dressed in soft white silk, almost covered with waves and folds of creamy hue ; the lace was drawn high about the throat, where it seemed to be held by a band of black velvet ; but her lovely arms were bare, except for a fall of lace, which was caught high upon the shoulder making a fleecy fulness at the back of the arm, and forming a soft setting for the rounded shoulder ; here and there, among the folds of lace were gleams of pure soft yellow, and she wore a cluster of yellow roses at her corsage.

"Do you like it?" she said, looking down at the yellow roses. "I—I was almost afraid it would seem too elaborate. Does it?"

"No," cried Madeline in genuine enjoyment of her friend's loveliness ; "not the least bit too elaborate for *you*, with your tall stateliness, and that dark hair and dainty paleness. Why do not all brunettes have your delicate colouring instead of so *much* red and olive?"

Moina laughed softly.

"You are trying to make the best of my lukewarm colouring, Madeline, and it's very good of you. If you could have seen the lovely brunettes who passed me as I came!—the *loveliest* peach bloom, and, I was about to say, *brown*"—and she laughed again—"and *such* eyes; she was a tiny creature"—here she broke off suddenly. Madeline had approached her and was looking admiringly at the cobweb pattern

through which her white shoulders gleamed. "Do you like the—lace?"

"It's exquisite! You must know I have a weakness for laces. And this; it was never bought in New York?"

"No; it's part of my inheritance."

"Ah!" Madeline drew back a little. "Pardon my over-curiosity."

"It is not over-curiosity. I was thinking as I came to-day—I'll admit that my sumptuous dinner dress started the train of thought—that I had told you very little of myself, and that I owed it to you to tell you more."

"Now, Moina——"

"Oh, but wait. Just see how this gown has startled you. And I enjoyed the making it so *much*."

"The *making!*"

"Yes, I made it—almost every bit myself. I arranged all the draperies and the lace."

"It's classical!" declared Madeline.

"Is it? Well, I was about to say that I enjoyed it *so* much. I had no idea one could get so much comfort out of a bit of extravagance; but it demands explanation, for I am going to repeat it."

"The dress?"

"Yes, in another form. You must know, my dear, I'm an heiress, almost like yourself; and I'm just beginning to realize it—and to enjoy it."

"Is it something new then, dear? And am I to congratulate you?"

"It's rather new, yes. It came to our knowledge only a little while before we came to America. You know how I have roamed about the world with papa, and how my dear mother died when I was so young. She was the younger daughter of a proud English family, and her marriage displeased them. She was disinherited."

Madeline noted the light note of scorn in her voice as she spoke of the proud English family, and the immediate softening as she went on.

"Mamma's oldest sister never quite gave her up. She wrote to mamma always, when she could; and after poor mamma died, it was she who, by letter, for she never would travel, and papa would not go to England for many years, persuaded papa to send me from him to school. She *wanted* me sent to England, but papa sent me to a Paris convent instead," she stopped, sighed, and then smiled.

"Ah, the dear old school days," she said softly. "I missed papa sadly. It was our first—our only separation. Except for this, I was very happy at the convent. Well, it was this aunt, whom I had never seen, who died three years ago, and left me all that she possessed. It was so arranged that we were not informed until after my eighteenth birthday, which was only six months ago. One of her commands was that I should wear no mourning for a relative I had never seen; another, that I was to use the income from her fortune in my own way, so long as it was for my personal benefit. But I must not part with it, by gift, or otherwise. I must keep it and enjoy it, and live, as she said, 'as a young English gentlewoman should,'" here she laughed softly. "My poor English auntie! I'm afraid that I have imbibed

so much Bohemianism in my rambling life with papa, that I shall never succeed in making myself a model after her own heart. Indeed, Madeline, you don't know what a cynic I might have become had it not been for you."

"And what have I done?" asked Miss Payne, laughingly.

"Have you not opened the gates of the fairyland called society, and let me look within? Why, only a little while ago, I was beseeching papa to let me give myself over bodily to—good works; to dedicate my fortune to it, so far as I could."

"Do you mean," asked Madeline, in amazement, "that you seriously meditated entering a sisterhood—cutting yourself off from the world?"

Moina's face flushed.

"Something like that," she said, with her eyes turned away.

They were both silent for a moment, then Moina added, "Every healthy life needs some object, I suppose; at least, I have grown up in that belief. And, although my own individual existence has been a peculiarly sheltered one, yet my outlook has been—often upon the seamy side of the life about me. My father is a lover of his more unfortunate bre—— fellow-beings. And has always been in some sort a missionary among them. He has taught me that the world is *not* all sunshine."

She paused again, both girls wore serious faces now; both had forgotten the beautiful toilet, and all frivolous things.

Suddenly, Moina arose, and stood before her friend with her hands stretched out appealingly.

"Madeline," she said, "*have* we a right to be happy—as happy as we *can*—while all around us there is so *much* suffering?"

"Yes," said Madeline, firmly, "every human being has a right to all the happiness he can come by honestly, and every one who is honestly happy seeks the happiness of his fellows. Moina, there is duty—and there is mistaken self-sacrifice; they are not the same. You are too young for the latter—perhaps you have seen too much of the seamy side; it comes to us fast enough, without our seeking it. Come, look at the other side a little while. Try to be happy in a mere butterfly fashion before the rôle palls upon you, as it will, if you follow it fast and far enough. You are young, beautiful, an heiress, and in New York. Gaiety won't spoil *you*, Moina."

"Oh, I don't know," sighed the girl, "sometimes I am afraid of it. My father says the same things to me. He wants me to be sure of myself—to choose, as he did, from knowledge, and after I have seen both sides. I *do* like my present life, Madeline, and I don't want to like it too much. Try it for a year, that is what papa says; but what if, at the end of a year, it has conquered me? You don't know how all this—your dainty little dinners, our drives and operas, and concerts, the gentle refined people you have always about you—charms me! Why, even my shopping and dressing is an absorbing pleasure. And, Madeline, I meant, I *mean*, when my year is up, to dedicate my life to poor humanity."

"That's what nearly every poor girl comes to, sooner or later, Moina, my dear," said Madeline, struggling with the dimples that came peeping out, driving the gravity out of her face. "Only, I hope you

won't begin your missionary work so *soon*. You're just the sort of generous, impulsive, girl-woman to go and lay your life at the feet of some fragment of 'poor humanity.' But——"

"Ah, now, you know I don't mean that!"

"Oh, I know what you *mean*. I'm thousands of years older than you; come—come *in*," she finished.

It was Mrs. Ralston who broke in upon their *tête-à-tête*, and who greeted Moina with sweet and gentle dignity.

"My dear, I did not know you were here," she said. "And your father? you could not persuade him, after all?"

"No. I *wrote* Madeline here, that papa was really busy, and that, for this time, I would come early and alone. I must also go early. Yes, I promised papa. He is not at all well; I feel anxious about him."

"Perhaps he is too much of a recluse," suggested Mrs. Ralston. "An artist needs out-of-door life."

"It is not that," said Moina, quickly, "papa has not been strong for years. He has other interests that are more ab——" she checked herself suddenly. And at that moment a servant announced the arrival of the first dinner-guests, the Girards.

There were no vacant places at the luxurious flower-laden table. And when they were seated, Moina found herself between Mr. Lord and Roger Drexel, the latter being her escort.

It was her first presentation to Mr. and Mrs. Follingsbee, but they were most approachable people, and quite at home at Mr. Lord's table; the others she knew quite well, and the dinner progressed cheerily. The table was circular in shape, and the party of ten were not compelled to break up into groups, or, still worse, to "pair off," in order to converse.

When the dessert was at last before them, there was a momentary lull, after much talking, and Mr. Follingsbee leaned forward and addressed Mr. Lord.

"Mr. Lord, is it true that a strike is looked for in the Ormstook factories?"

Mr. Lord looked up quickly and knit his brows.

"If my voice controlled the Ormstook, Follingsbee, they might *strike* in welcome. The strike *is* threatened. By Jove!—ladies, I beg your pardon—but really, it irritates me to hear how those fellows go on, clamouring for more wages, on the plea that they can't clothe and feed their families; and if they don't get what they are howling for they deliberately sit down, earning *nothing*, letting their families starve, or else accepting from the charity of their unions less than half of what they could earn, and letting themselves, according to their own testimony, starve on that. I think it's high time for a new order of things. I heard Ely say the other day that he'd like to make one of a union of employers who wouldn't have a union man in his employ, and I feel like saying the same thing."

The start and the look of surprise with which Moina La Croix turned towards him was noted by those nearest her.

"Why, Mr. Lord!" she said quickly, "do not you believe in the working-men's unions?"

"I don't believe in the striking-men's unions, Miss La Croix; they are turning our working-men into rioters and loafers. The unions were well enough in their original intentions, but they're far enough now from their old standards; now, when two or three cranks find their way into a union of decent men, and grind away until the men begin to own the works, and 'run' their employers; then pandemonium begins. If this country's ever ruined, it will be ruined by the working people!—their 'leagues' and 'unions.'"

There was an unusual flush upon Moina's cheek, and a fine light in her eyes.

"Excuse me the discussion, Mr. Lord," she said, with a faint smile; "I have lived much abroad, and have seen the sufferings and the oppression of the poor, and the indifference of the rich—their taskmasters. If I were a man I should be—a socialist."

A moment of complete silence followed this sentence, and then the stern look left the face of their host, and a smile appeared in its stead as he leant towards his fairest guest.

"Let me thank you for that 'if,'" he said, with old-fashioned gallantry; "if you should announce yourself a socialist unqualified, and should seek to proselyte me, I dare say you would hear of my setting fire to my own house and letting Mrs. Ralston and Miss Payne here starve in the street, while I struck for higher wages."

In the midst of the laughter that followed this absurdity, the dangerous subject was dropped, only as Moina turned away her flushing face she met the intent gaze of her escort; and, under cover of the laughing comment, she said to him, half defiantly, and moved by some sudden impulse:

"Are you horror-stricken at my sentiments, Mr. Drexel?"

He glanced quickly about him before he answered her, in a tone quite as guarded as her own.

"I am delighted, Miss La Croix; there are excellent reasons why I do not proclaim it from the house tops, but—I, too, am a socialist."

For a moment their eyes met, and then Moina turned her face away.

When the ladies were again in the drawing-room, Mrs. Follingsbee dropped upon a divan beside Mrs. Ralston and drew a long sigh of relief.

"Oh!" she said, in her naturally full tones; "*did* you see me digging Follingsbee in the ribs?—yes, actually *digging*. That man leaves all his acuteness behind him when he leaves his office, I often tell him. He was going to make an awful blunder right on the heels of——" she checked herself suddenly—"of his first one," she added.

"How is that, Mrs. Follingsbee?" Mrs. Ralston asked, smilingly.

Mrs. Follingsbee turned upon her suddenly.

"*Didn't* I hear Mr. Lord say that he had not been out of doors to-day?" she asked.

"Yes; he has not been out. It has been one of his rheumatism days."

"Oh—ho! Then ten to one Follingsbee *would* have startled him not a little—or *have* you heard of the Peasley business?"

"Peasley?—no—what?"

"I knew it couldn't have got into the papers so soon." Mrs. Follingsbee hurried on, "You remember how they burned his factory, a year ago nearly?"

"Yes; Olive wrote about it."

"Well, *next* they burned his barn. That was not long ago."

"Mrs. Follingsbee!" exclaimed Madeline, "*when?* we did not hear of *that!*"

"It can't have been more than four months ago. Well, *now* they have burned that fine new residence of his, and left a letter threatening additional outrage, pinned to his gate-post *with a knife*."

"Poor Mr. Peasley!" sighed Mrs. Ralston. "How they pursue that man!"

"I'm very glad you didn't let Mr. Follingsbee fire *that* shot at the table," said Madeline.

"And I," added Olive Girard. "He can't have heard of it. He would not have let it pass without mention when—if he had."

There was a sudden movement behind Madeline; she turned, and saw Moina, who had been seated before an easel of engravings, standing at her elbow.

The girl's face was quite colourless now, and Madeline could feel how the hand upon her arm trembled.

"Pardon me; what is the name of this—this unfortunate gentleman?"

"Mr. Peasley, Mr. *Acton* Peasley," said Mrs. Follingsbee, promptly. "There are so many Peasleys," she added.

"Oh!" said Moina, faintly. "Thank you, I—I don't know this—*this* Mr. Peasley," and she turned back to the easel. Her eyes were still burning; but Madeline, who still watched her anxiously from time to time, noted that her colour did not return.

The gentlemen did not linger long in the dining-room, and shortly after their reappearance Moina withdrew quietly, declining all offer of aid or escort. "A carriage would be in waiting," she said, and so it was; and Madeline, after bidding her a sisterly farewell at the top of the stairs, and promising to drive with her next day, went back to the others in the drawing-room.

Mr. Lord's house was one of the stately older-fashioned ones that are so much admired, so seldom imitated now. Its large vestibule led up by a short flight to a larger square hall of reception, around three sides of which ran the stairway, broken by three landings. Under each of these landings opened the great doors of drawing-room, dining-room, and library respectively, and the hall itself was lighted by a dome high above, and was richly furnished.

Into this spacious hall Mr. Lord usually escorted the departing guests whom he especially delighted to honour. It was here, too, that letters were often left for different members of the household, especially if said members were out: they must pass through the hall upon their return and on going or coming from library or dining-room. It was here that Madeline often found her bouquets and baskets of flowers, on the great claw-footed table that stood in the centre of the square place; here that Mr. Lord looked for his newspaper, and here that visitors' cards were often left.

When the time for departure came, the guests set out almost together, and Mrs. Ralston and Mr. Lord came down into the reception-hall with the Follingsbees, Mr. and Mrs. Girard, and Dr. Clarence Vaughan. As he stood by the square table listening to some final remarks from Mrs. Follingsbee, Mr. Lord glanced down and saw a little packet, which he took up smilingly.

"I don't often do such a thing," he said, as he held up the packet; and then he lowered his voice: "The day after to-morrow is Miss Payne's birthday, and as I couldn't get out to-day, I *sent* for—what do you think? Ah, there's some comfort in being an old fellow, eh, Vaughan? *I* can give *my* sweetheart a ring." He tossed the packet from one hand to the other. "I shall submit these samples to——"

Heavens! what a flash! What a hideous, deafening, blinding, report! What was that horrible smell filling the place where already the smoke was blinding them? And what a heartrending, ear-piercing cry! Then other cries, groans, shrieks, and the sound of falling bodies!

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INFERNAL MACHINE.

ROGER DREXEL and Madeline had remained in the rear drawing-room, and Madeline, after bidding their friends adieu, returned. They were standing beside the mantel, and as yet had hardly spoken, when the explosion without startled them both into instant action. "Great emergencies," some writer has said, "are often our introductions to the heroes in our midst," and the conduct of Drexel and Madeline was singularly similar. Without a word, without exchanging a glance, without the loss of an instant of time, the two sprang toward the reception-hall.

Arrived at the door, each paused for just an instant to discover, if possible through the blinding smoke, where help was most needed. Little could be seen; but about the table the smoke was thickest, and two or three little tongues of flame were already reaching upward from near the floor.

Drexel's thoughts were swift to grasp the situation, and he at once flung himself upon these flickering flames. As he seized a rug and pressed it down with a firm hand over the prostrate figure that was the centre of this smoking horror, Madeline caught at the heavy cloth that covered the table, and flung it down where, almost at her feet, a swift blaze sprang up. Then came the quick, stern order from Drexel:

"Put out the lights, *quick!*"

With a swift spring Madeline was on the table, and the lights above it went out; at the same moment those near the door of entrance were extinguished.

"*Now* let in the air—open the door," came from Drexel, who now felt assured that the senseless body beneath his hand was that of Mr. Lord. "Lord," he said softly, "are you much hurt?" No answer; then, "Speak someone—*any* one who *can!*" he cried.

Dr. Vaughan's voice broke the stillness, sounding strange and half-smothered:

"I—I have not been hurt—only strangled with smoke." He began to cough.

"Don't stir yet—any of you," now commanded Drexel. "Be patient a moment. Follingsbee, are *you* hurt?"

"Only a bit stunned," came the lawyer's answer. "But—I think—my wife—is killed."

"Oh, Heaven!——"

"Hush!" said Drexel, sharply. "This is the work of a bomb—Doctor——" He paused, seeming to hesitate.

"I understand, Drexel," said the doctor's voice: "we can't strike a light *yet*."

And so for some moments longer in fear, in terror, in hope, in despair, they waited for the light; while those who could see or think dreaded what its rays might reveal of disaster and doom.

When at last the paralyzed servant, aided by the doctor, had lighted the hall once more, what they saw was ghastly enough. Nearest the table lay Elias Lord, half supported now by Drexel's strong arm. Hands and face were blistered and bleeding; his clothing, about the chest and shoulders, was burned, and the fragment of a little metal box was still clutched in one tense hand.

Nearest him lay Mrs. Ralston, with a livid scar across the pale cheek that was uppermost, and with the skirts of her gauze-like black gown hanging in charred fragments about her, she was conscious, and, after a few moments of heroic and nerve-strung silence, began to moan with pain.

Mrs. Follingsbee, quite unconscious, was lying half under the table, and her husband, hardly realizing that he was wounded, and with two or three burns upon hands and neck, bent over her, chafing her hands, and whispering her name in frantic appeal.

Neither Olive nor Philip Girard were hurt, but Olive had fainted, and Philip, not daring to hope that she had escaped uninjured, was holding her clasped in his arms, and awaiting in breathless suspense for whatever revelation the light might bring.

Impossible to describe such a scene.

After the first swift survey, Doctor Vaughan had said—

"They are all alive; but we must have another doctor here at once."

And Drexel had added—

"And all others must be kept out until we have investigated further." Then he had hastened to rally the frightened servants. And when Olive had recovered from her swoon, prompt action took the place of the paralyzed fear that had been made doubly awful by the darkness and doubt of the first few moments.

Mrs. Follingsbee had not been touched by the fragments of the missile, nor the flying bits of burning tow. But she had struck her head against the heavy table in falling, the fall having been caused by the shock of the concussion, quite as much as by fright; while her husband, in springing forward to her assistance, had been struck upon the wrist by a fragment of the exploded metal, and burned by the flying tow.

The tall servant, his hand upon the door opening into the vestibule, had been waiting the signal to open it, and Doctor Vaughan had said good-night to his host and Mrs. Ralston, and was waiting for the others beside the footman at the door. Near him, Girard was helping Olive with her wraps, and so these four had escaped almost uninjured.

Mrs. Ralston had been painfully burned, but had not been hurt by the flying fragments of the missile.

And Mr. Lord—with him the infernal machine had wrought frightfully. It was impossible to gauge the extent of his injuries.

In a surprisingly short space of time, coolness, clear heads, and strong wills, had made themselves felt through all the shock and disaster. Drexel was ably seconded by Philip Girard, and while Dr. Vaughan, Madeline, and Olive took their stations beside the injured ones, these two took all else into their own hands.

A second physician soon arrived, and Drexel and Philip carried Mrs. Follingsbee to Madeline's room—for it was at once decided that she must not be removed—and directed by the doctor, went hurrying to and fro, sending the servants for necessary articles, and making themselves generally useful.

It was not long before Madeline came to their assistance. With cheeks pale, but with firm lips, keen, observant eyes, and quick thoughtfulness, that aroused Roger Drexel's wonder and admiration.

At the first moment, when there seemed absolutely nothing for her hands to do above stairs, Madeline went slowly down to the lower floor. Upon the second landing she paused. Just below her stood Drexel, his face was in profile, and she noted, for the first time, how very grave and stern that face could be. He was looking down into the hall below, and, after a moment's hesitation, she came swiftly down, and stood at his side. The slight sound made by her trailing draperies had caught his ear, and without turning, he put out his hand.

"No one must go——" he turned, and checked his speech suddenly. "Pardon me, Miss Payne! I did not know it was you. Were you going down?"

"What were you about to say, Mr. Drexel?"

"I have told the servants—and the others, not to cross that hall needlessly. It ought to remain just as it is until—until some one can examine it carefully—and alone."

She drew a breath of relief.

"That has been on my mind from the very first," she said. "How glad I am that you have done this. Mr. Drexel, don't you think that something ought to be done—soon?"

"Yes," he said, with his eyes upon the disordered hall of reception. Suddenly he turned towards her. "Miss Payne, do you not think that we have let Fate baffle us once too often? Is it not time that *we* took council together?"

"Now?" she asked.

"Yes, *now*, before something *worse* happens."

Suddenly she put out her hand, and caught his arm in a firm grasp.

"Mr. Drexel—do you mean—is it possible—did you wish to talk to me about—did you *anticipate* anything like—*this?*"

"Did *you?*" he asked.

She met his gaze, and was silent.

"What I wished to say *then*," he said, "I must say now, and more. *Now*, I must say something about *this*," he waved his hand toward the room below. "I have done what, in my judgment, seemed best," he went on, gravely. "A servant is stationed in the vestibule to send any who may apply for admission, to the side entrance. For the present, this place will not be disturbed. And before we take further steps, I must speak with you alone, Miss Payne."

She bent her head in thought a moment.

"Let us wait," she said, "until we hear from Mr. Lord. It will not be long now. Doctor Layton has looked after Mrs. Follingsbee, and showed my maid and Mrs. Girard what to do. Mr. Follingsbee's hurts have been dressed, and are not serious ; he is with Mr. Girard and the two physicians in Mr. Lord's room."

"And Mrs. Ralston?"

"I have dressed her burns and given her an opiate, by the doctor's order. The housekeeper is with her."

Some one came in sight on the upper landing. "There is Mr. Girard," she said ; and then seeing them standing below, Philip Girard came down to them.

"He is still insensible," he said, "and they have turned us out, Follingsbee and me. Vaughan says we need expect no change in Mr. Lord's condition for some time yet. And Olive is anxious about Phil. I will run home, and come back soon. I will bring the housekeeper with me—you know she is a capital nurse ; she will look after Mrs. Follingsbee." He passed and went down two or three steps. Then he turned back and said in a guarded tone, "Vaughan has said enough to explain to us the nature of the engine that wrought this mischief. Drexel, there's some work here for a sharp detective."

"Yes," assented Drexel. And Girard, after viewing the hall a moment from the lower stair, turned abruptly and went across the drawing-room, and so out by the side entrance.

Then Madeline turned to Drexel.

"Please go into the library," she said. "That room is sure to remain in solitude. I will go upstairs, and if all is quiet—if I am not needed, I will come down to you at once."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SMILES AND TEARS.

MOINA LA CROIX had been more than usually happy on the day of the dinner. When she was arraying herself in the flowing silk and soft lace, and adjusting the yellow roses, she had smiled happily at her reflection in the mirror, and loved the world for its brightness, and her own life for the capacity for happiness which it contained.

"After all, I think papa was right!" she mused. "Why may I *not* be happy—for a year at least? I am so young, and perhaps—who knows?—a long life of usefulness, yes, of sacrifice, may lie back of this little year, this bright little year, that lies before me—when it is over—but then. This year is *mine*. I did not seek it. It came to me!

I put it away until it seemed to be a duty, a *filial duty*, to take it, and all the good and joy it may bring me. *Will* it bring me joy?"

But here she had resolutely broken off her musings, and hastened, radiant in her dainty apparel, into her father's presence.

A little of the brightness forsook her face, when she found Rufus Crashaw sitting with him in his little study behind the dining-room.

She saw the pride and pleasure in her father's eyes, and the admiration in the eyes of Crashaw; then another look came over the face of the latter, a look which she neither liked nor understood. She made her adieu hastily, and went out with his words of unwelcome compliment sounding in her ears.

But once outside, she forgot him utterly. The late afternoon was very lovely, and she leaned back among the carriage cushions and promised herself that she would at last have a few bright, cheery words with her father upon her return.

"If only I *could* coax him to go about with me a little!" she said to herself. "I *know* he thinks too much; he thinks all the time. And he has begun to pace his room late at night, just as he used to do when we were in Paris and Vienna. His cheeks are so often flushed too, and his eyes burn so, sometimes. My poor papa, he is so *earnest* —I was almost saying *too* earnest—but I suppose one can't be *that*. And he *says* he is quite well!"

A carriage, with a lovely brunette face looking out, flashed past and caught her attention, and she thought no more of serious things. Only, when later, she sat at the glowing table and looked upon the kindly, smiling faces about her, she said to herself again, "If *only* I had papa here! I shall describe all this for him to-night; I'll try to make him want to come." Innocent Moina, looking into those bright and carefree faces about her. How could she guess that a secret and unacknowledged dread was every day finding deeper lodgment in the breast of her host; that her handsome and *debonnaire* escort and her friend, Madeline, were both concealing a growing anxiety; and that a strange blending of fear and sorrow was slowly taking possession of that noble-looking self-contained man who sat beside Madeline, Dr. Clarence Vaughan?

Then came Mr. Follingsbee's unlucky speech, her host's rejoinder, her own hasty words.

It had all been carried off most adroitly; but the evening was not the same to her after that.

She was glad when they were again in the parlour, and then she had been startled afresh by Mrs. Follingsbee's words.

The fine new residence of Acton Peasley burned to the ground! Acton Peasley! How the name rung in her ears! Her evening was indeed spoiled now. She was glad when she could take her leave. She put on her light wraps hurriedly, and begged Madeline not to follow her to the lower landing; Mrs. Follingsbee, who had come upstairs with them, was still in the dressing-room. Moina caught Madeline's hand, pressed it nervously, and sent her back to Mrs. Follingsbee. Then she ran lightly down the stairs, past the tall and slow-moving footman, and out into the vestibule. There she had paused for a moment, and her hands fluttered about among her wraps

and draperies. Suddenly she turned, went quickly back, without so much as addressing the servant, paused just a second to drop a fan, a filmy handkerchief, and a long glove, or something like it, upon the square table, a step further on, and then she stooped to take up a veil which had fluttered down unnoticed as she ran downstairs, and went back again. The tall footman, looking with surprised eyes at the young lady who served herself so lightly and gracefully, saw her catch up a handful of things from the table, disentangle something, put something down, and then, in a moment, he was bowing low as she passed out, and closing the door behind her.

"I must tell papa," she was saying to herself as she drove homeward; "I must tell him to-night before I sleep."

"Where is monsieur?" she asked of the little maid-servant who had followed her fortunes across the seas, and who met her at the threshold.

"He is gone out, mademoiselle—with the English gentleman."

Moina sighed, and went past her and up the stairs.

"Mademoiselle," said the maid, coming after her, "I think he left you a message—a note—in the study."

"Take my wrappings, Margot," said Moina, abruptly, and in another moment she was locking herself in her father's study with a stern look upon her face.

"I'm going to *look!*" she muttered, as she turned the key. "It's always 'that English gentleman' of late; he monopolises my father; sometimes I fancy he is changing him somehow, that poor papa is growing different."

She flung down the white train that she had held caught up in one hand, and swept across the room. In her progress she caught a glimpse of herself in a cabinet mirror, and paused to look.

"I am *angry*," she said, scornfully, to her stern-faced image. "Yes, *angry!* What business has a social butterfly to be angry? Bah! but then—I'm not a social butterfly, *here*—I'm, yes, I *am* a *socialist*—of course." She laughed, and flung herself down in her father's chair, her feelings a strange mixture of mockery, nervousness, and dread.

Then she remembered her father's note, and reached out and took it from the desk.

He had forgotten to mention to her a meeting of some importance which he must attend. He was feeling so much better that she need have no uneasiness about him. She must not sit up for him; he would not return until late.

"Poor papa," she said, dropping the note into her lap, "I can see by these lines that he was excited and in haste—yet he remembers my antipathy, and does not name the 'English gentleman.'" She laughed, with less nervousness this time, and more amiability. And then she sat in her father's chair for a long time thinking with a serious countenance.

"I *must* know," she said at last. "I have a *right* to know."

She went over to the cabinet, and opened the mirror door. The cabinet contained a row of shelves, well laden with various articles, and from among these she took a small ebony box, opened it by pressing a spring, and took out a bunch of keys.

Crossing again to her father's desk, she unlocked it quickly, seated herself before it, and took, from among other similar books, the one she sought.

She was familiar enough with the thin slim volume ; she had been her father's amanuensis so long now that he would have been at a loss without her. She was well acquainted, in a certain superficial way, with the statistics and figures, the names and data contained in this little manuscript library, so much of its contents was in her own graceful and singularly clear chirography. But familiar as she was with much, there was yet much that she did not understand.

It had been her habit to copy unquestioningly, to write from dictation in the same manner. Her father had early taught her the habit. The work that she did had grown mechanical to her, and almost meaningless.

At first she turned the pages swiftly, merely glancing as they passed under her eye ; then slower, and last, very slowly, running her eyes down each page before passing to the next. A red flush began to burn in her cheeks, her hands were beginning to tremble. Once she stopped and half-closed the book, looking about her nervously ; then, shutting her lips together, she drew a long sigh and resolutely turned the next leaf.

And now, slowly, like a schoolgirl, with a finger upon the topmost lines, she began to read down the page.

"*Ah!*" She catches her breath, and her face grows ghastly pale, she puts a hand to her eyes and shudders, withdraws it, and looks again.

"Ah, heaven!"

How long does she sit there, with the book upon her knee? She does not think about the time, but, by and by, she rises with slow mechanical movements, puts away the book, locks the desk, replaces the keys in the ebony box, and closes the cabinet. There is no colour in her cheeks now, no light in her eyes.

Like a somnambulist she leaves the study, locks the door, goes to her room, locks herself in again, and sinks into the nearest chair Again long moments pass and are not noted. By and by she hears a carriage stop before the door. Her room is only lighted by the street lamp without, and she does not stir when she hears two voices outside, more than two voices she would have perceived at any other time. The voices came into the house, yes, up the stairs, and into the study ; doors are opened and shut, but still she sits moveless beside her own chamber door.

Presently someone taps there lightly, she hears, she is within hand's reach of the door, but she does not answer, she does not stir from her place.

"Mademoiselle! Oh, Mademoiselle Moina! it is Margot," but Margot gets no reply, she calls again, and still again, she even tries the door, very gently, then she goes away, saying to herself,

"How soundly these happy people sleep," and then she sighs.

A little longer and she hears doors open and close again, the carriage door shuts, the vehicle drives away.

Then a slow step sounds down the hall, a tremulous voice calls,

"Moina—my daughter."

Moina puts a shaking hand upon two quivering lips, and catches her breath.

The steps recede as slowly as they came, and presently all the house is still. Then Moina gets up and goes to the window. She looks up and down the brilliant street, and suddenly tosses up her arms.

"Oh, my God!" she moans. "Is *this* how it is to end, or is this only the beginning? Oh, mother, mother in heaven——" and then she flings herself down beside the window and bursts into a wild tumult of sobbing, tearless passion, of all grief the most horrible to endure or to witness, grief that rends, and racks, and tortures, while no tears come to relieve the awful tension upon heart, and nerve, and brain.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DETECTIVE HURST.

"WELL?" said Drexel, when Madeline came to him in the library—he had not waited two minutes.

"I am not needed, but the stillness in Mr. Lord's room is ominous," she said.

Drexel was silent.

Madeline seated herself in the very chair she had occupied on the occasion of her first interview with Mr. Lord, concerning the anonymous letters, and in obedience to her gesture he sat down beside her.

"I am glad of this opportunity, Mr. Drexel," she began, at once, "I don't know what it is that you may have to say to me, but the thing which most nearly concerns me now is this attack upon Mr. Lord. I want to speak of it, and of him. If your business——"

"My business, like yours, concerned and *concerns* Mr. Lord, Miss Payne. Only a part of what I meant to say ten days ago, what I ought to have said, while I had the opportunity, has been horribly anticipated."

"Do you mean," she began, and then became silent while she gazed at him with wide, open, astonished eyes.

"I meant," he said, "when I sought an interview with you, to tell you something that had come to my knowledge concerning Mr. Lord; and I also meant, if I could obtain your promise of secrecy, to confide to you certain matters concerning myself; and, last, to ask for your co-operation. One moment," as Madeline seemed about to speak, "I *meant* this, but now there is no time for a prolonged consultation, we must act."

"That is what I wanted to say to you, Mr. Drexel, and I meant to ask you to give me your aid," said Madeline. "You dropped some words at our last interview that have remained in my mind ever since. If we might have understood each other *then*—but let that pass. You heard what Mr. Girard said out there — that there was need of a detective here?"

He nodded.

"I want you to help me in this; I want you to find and bring me a detective."

For a moment he remained silently regarding her, then he slowly took a letter from his pocket and drew it from its envelope.

"I came here to-night prepared for this interview," he said; "I am about to commit myself, have I your promise of secrecy?"

"Yes, if my word is enough."

"Your word is enough. Have you happened to hear of one Hurst?"

"*Hurst the detective?* Indeed, I have! But I hardly dare hope to secure *his* help."

"I don't know," smiling slightly, "will you read that note?"

She took it from his hand and glanced at it, looked again, and then turned upon his face eyes of mute astonishment.

He caught the note deftly as it fluttered from her fingers, and quietly awaited her next words.

The note was as follows:

"DEAR MADAM,—I take pleasure at the request of the gentleman in question, in assuring you that the skilful detective known as *Hurst* and *Roger A. Drexel* are *one and the same.*"

It was officially dated and signed by the Chief of Police.

Madeline was silent for a long moment, when she spoke her words were characteristic.

"After all I am not so much astonished as I ought to be; you have been something of a riddle to me, Mr. Drexel, and this is the solution."

She took the note from him and read it again. "I must get used to you in your new character," she said, and was again silent for a moment, scanning his face meantime with a frankly intent gaze, a sense of great relief was taking possession of her, already her active mind was beginning to work.

"I begin to understand," she said finally. "As a detective you had learned something—something concerning Mr. Lord; and you wanted to get further evidence from me."

"I wanted your co-operation," he corrected.

"Mine!"

"Yours. I will be brief and frank. I had learned that Mr. Lord had identified himself with the new league of the capitalist, as against the banded socialists and strikers. I knew his outspoken hatred of these people, and that he was making himself a marked man because of his openly avowed sentiments. I wanted to stand between him and harm if possible. And I wanted a confederate within the camp."

"I see," said Madeline thoughtfully.

"Lately," Drexel went on, "I have found that already Mr. Lord has been set down among the proscribed—black-listed, in fact."

Madeline arose suddenly. "Wait," she said, and went to the door and looked out into the square reception-hall. All was quiet above and below stairs, and she closed the door and came back.

"And now," she said, "*I* have a story to tell—a confidence."

"I will regard it as such."

"As a detective," she went on quickly, "it is necessary that you know it, and the sooner the better. That is—I am taking your assistance for granted."

"Of course."

She seated herself beside him and lowered her voice.

"Mr. Lord has been warned twice, at least," she said.

"Oh! Tell me all you know or guess."

"I will;" and in a few swiftly-spoken, well-chosen words, she told of the two anonymous letters, of her interviews with Mr. Lord, and the charge he had given her.

When all was told he asked—

"Did you promise him your assistance?"

"How could I refuse?"

"You—your father's daughter—*could* not." She flushed rosily "And so you are committed? Do you realize what that means?"

"It means more responsibility than I can or dare assume, Mr. Drexel; it means work fit for—*Mr. Hurst.*"

Drexel got up and took a turn across the room.

"Miss Payne," he said, coming back and standing before her, "I mean to do my utmost in this matter; but—I have other affairs of importance, which I cannot, dare not, neglect. In this and in other matters I need just such help as you could give me, if you would. Before this catastrophe I meant to ask your aid. I ask it now; I must have a woman's help. There is no woman who would help me, who *could* help me, as you can, if you will."

"I! Are there not women trained to this work? I am not a detective."

"No, thank goodness! One of the profession would be useless to me. No one else could do what I ask of you. You will understand why when I have told you more. But let this pass. When Mr. Lord and his affairs are concerned we are to be allies, are we not?"

"Yes; of course I expect you to conduct things, Mr.—Hurst."

Madeline hesitated over the assumed name very much, as the Princess Sacha had done.

Drexel resumed his seat, and remained silent a moment; then he said,

"I will take you at your word, and we will begin in earnest now."

Madeline started.

"Now?" she ejaculated.

"At once. Will you be so kind as to call in the servant who opened the door to your guests?"

"Ah!" a quick look of intelligence crossing her face. "I begin to understand."

She went out swiftly, and returned a moment later, followed by the footman.

"Hovey," she said, "this gentleman has something to say to you."

Hovey, who was an importation, and a model of his class, bowed, faced toward Drexel, and bowed again. He was a man of middle age, with a tall figure, an acquired air of dignity, which sat upon him very well, and a face of expressionless calm. Two very natural sentiments, not desirable, however, in a good footman, he had steadily put down

at least the natural signs of them, and they never found their way to his face. These were surprise and curiosity.

Drexel studied the man in silence for a moment. Then he began, a little to Madeline's surprise, with, "Hovey, how long have you been here?"

"In this 'ouse, sir?" asked Hovey, deferentially.

"Yes."

"Habout six months, sir."

"And how long have you been in this country?"

"Habout a year and a 'alf, sir."

Drexel, who had been standing, now seated himself. Had the footman been an American or an Irishman, he would have bidden him sit also. But he knew better than to lower himself in Hovey's estimation by any undue familiarity, and he said, in his most impressive manner,

"Hovey, I want to ask you about the events of the last twenty-four hours, and I want you to have all your wits about you."

"Yes, sir."

"What sort of a person was it who left that box of explosives at the door?"

Madeline leaned forward intent upon the answer, looking eager and anxious; but Hovey was immovable.

"Indeed, sir, I couldn't say."

"What! Did not *you* receive it?"

"No, sir, I can't think as I did. If I 'ad I couldn't 'ave forgot it."

"Who relieved you—who took your place in attendance then?"

"Nobody, sir. I've answered hevery ring all day and hevenin'. Hi 'aven't been hout to-day."

"But when you were at dinner—at the other meals?"

"Hi always minds my own door, sir, when I'm in the 'ouse. Nobody rang to-day hat noon or hat tea-time."

"You are *sure* of this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you observe the contents of that table out there? Take note of letters and packages that are left upon it?"

"Mostly, sir. I take the letters and papers mostly when I'm there, and puts them on the table with my own 'ands."

"Ah! and that box? Are you sure it did not come with the mail?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure, sir. It wasn't there when the last mail came, sir."

"Are you *sure* of that? Think. When did you first observe that box upon the table?"

"I, sir? La! *I* never hobserved it at all!"

"*What!*"

"It's the fact, sir. *I never seen that box at all!*"

Drexel and Madeline exchanged glances.

"And yet you have been on duty all day."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Hovey, think. Begin at the beginning with the first caller, and tell us whom you have opened the door to all day. Try to remember any and all letters, cards, anything and everything."

"Hi can easy do that, sir. First, there's the letters and papers; the first as come. I took them in to Mr. Lord with me own 'ands.

Mr. Lord was 'ere, sir, and 'is orders is to bring in 'is letters when 'e's in, leave them on the table when 'e's hout."

"Go on."

"Then comes a parcel for Miss Payne 'ere, which I sent up to her."

"Yes," broke in Madeline, "some gloves and laces. That was before luncheon, Hovey."

"Just so, miss. The hother mails, letters, and papers I remember distinctly; I took from the 'ousemaid at the top of the basement stairs, and put on the table myself."

"Well."

"Next—after luncheon that was—two ladies called to see Mrs. Ralston."

"One moment, Hovey. Did those ladies approach the table? Do not callers often put down wraps, parasols, etc., there?"

"Sometimes, yes, sir; but these did not. Mrs. Ralston was hout, and they did not come in. I don't think anyone went near the table, sir, until the flowers came."

"Ah! the flowers!"

"Yes, sir. They came late: a big basket of cut flowers, and a lot of tiny bunches, sir. Hi told the boy to put 'em down on the table so as not to 'andle them too much, and they was took from there, almost immediately, to the dining-room."

"Can you describe the person that brought the flowers?" asked Drexel.

"It was a boy habout 'alf-growed, I should say. I didn't notice him particular."

"Did any of the other servants see this boy?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"And you can only remember that the boy was 'half-grown.' Try to recall his appearance, Hovey."

Hovey pondered a moment.

"Well, sir, I can't say anythink about 'is *face*, that's a fact; but—yes—he certainly was dressed in light clothes—anyways, a light coat; and he wore a 'at that wasn't either very light nor very dark."

"By which you mean that it was not a *black* hat, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; it warnt black sure, though I couldn't just name the colour it *was*, nor if it was a wool 'at or—another."

"What else do you recall about this boy—his speech, his manner?"

Hovey drew himself up, as if suddenly remembering his dignity.

"Why, sir, has for 'is *speech*, it would a flowed fast enough, perhaps, hif I 'adnt 'urried 'im up a bit. The flowers was a trifle late, and I was quite worried just then, not bein' ready to stand at duty, and wantin' to go hup to my room for a touch or two before the first guest harrived; so when the boy began to say as he'd brought the flowers as was hordered, hand was sorry habout bein' late, I broke 'im off short, as 'e was habout to say something more, by tellin' 'im to put down the flowers hon the table."

Hovey had a trick of dropping and taking up his h's according as he was in haste, or not at his ease, or, as he would have put it, "a

little flustered and worried." In England he would hardly have troubled himself to better his speech by dealing gently with the long-suffering h; but in America "things was different." Hovey felt encouraged here to aspire to the habits of his social superiors. "And 'e went away without hany more words," finished Hovey.

"Were any of the other servants near, in the hall or on the landing, when the boy came?"

"Not as I know of, sir."

Drexel was thoughtful a moment, then—

"Can you remember what was on the table, Hovey, at the time those flowers were placed there?"

"Well, not everything, sir. There's mostly always something there—papers, or books, or little parcels, or——"

"Were there any papers—*newspapers*, there then?—Think."

"Yes, sir; I *think* so, sir."

"Were they open or folded? Try to remember, Hovey."

Hovey hesitated a moment, then he said,

"Sometimes, sir, when I'm in waiting in the reception-'all, and there's visitors up in the drawing-room to be seen hout soon, I take a glance at a paper if it's honly folded."

"Yes, yes."

"I remember now, certain, that *one* of the evenin' papers was part open, because I 'ad been a-looking at it when the boy rang. There was two or three more papers lying in a little pile, an' Mr. Lord's 'at an' gloves was there, too, I remember. It's a way Mr. Lord 'as a laying down his 'at an' gloves, an' sometimes 'is stick, or hanything else he may 'appen to 'ave in his 'and."

"So it seems that when the boy put down the flowers there was already upon the table an open newspaper, two or three or more folded ones, and Mr. Lord's hat and gloves?"

"Yes, sir."

Before Drexel could utter the question next upon his lips, a servant came in search of Madeline. Mr. Lord had revived enough to speak, and had asked for her.

"I must go," she said to Drexel. "You will go on with this?"

Drexel bowed, and himself held open the door for her. If she could have seen his face as he closed it, she would have felt assured that her going at this especial moment was, for some reason, quite satisfactory to "Mr. Detective Hurst."

CHAPTER XXX.

A BASKET OF FLOWERS.

"HOVEY," said Drexel, when he had resumed his seat, "your memory is proving very serviceable. I hope you remember who came next—I mean after the boy from the florist's?"

"Nobody, sir—at least, not till the dinner guests began——"

"Ah! and who was the first dinner guest?"

Hovey smiled. He had seen Moina now often enough to have become her respectful admirer.

"It was Miss La Croix, sir."

There was a slight variation in the manner of the detective's next question, a scarcely perceptible change in his face.

"Don't misunderstand me, Hovey, if I question you about this lady—and the other guests. We must know just what happened at or about that table. Did Miss La Croix approach it?"

Hovey's voice took a lower tone; there was a half-scared look on his face.

"She did, sir," was all he said.

"Well, and how—what did she do, or say?"

"She asked me very kindly, sir, if she was the first, and I said 'yes'; and then she let go of her trained skirts, sir—she was at the foot of the vestibule steps, sir, when she spoke—and swept up and across the hall, smiling as if something pleased her very much, and stood by the table and put down 'er fan and—and some little things."

"*What* little things, Hovey?" Drexel's tone had changed from grave to stern. Hovey had spoken this last sentence slowly, as if weighing his words. "I see you were observant where this young lady is concerned. What did she put down besides the fan?"

"Well, sir, she 'ad a long veil in her 'and; one end was wrapped habout something—a parcel, or, maybe, a box——"

"Wait! Which was it, now—a box or a parcel?"

Hovey's eyes fell.

"Well, sir," he said, "Hi *think* 'twas a box; but, sir, I—I'm sure——"

"Look here, my good fellow," interrupted Drexel, with all trace of sternness gone from face and voice, "don't get absurd fancies into your head. Don't you see that I'm merely trying to find out if something might not have been laid upon that table carelessly, or by mistake; that, in some way, among the papers and so on, might have proved a combustible? Such things *have* happened."

Hovey looked relieved.

"I'm glad to 'ear you say that, sir," he said. "Hit almost seemed as hif you was going to suspect that charming young lady——"

"Pooh, my good man; how absurd of you. I wouldn't advise you to utter such an idea, such a suspicion, outside this room. Why, man, Miss La Croix is one of Miss Payne's dearest friends."

"So I thought, sir."

"No, Hovey. And, right here, a word for your own good: this has been a sad affair, and you can't afford to waste your time in thinking about Mr. Lord's *guests*. If suspicion lodges hereabouts, don't you know that it will be the *servants* who will be suspected?"

"Good 'eavens, sir. You don't never——"

"I don't suspect *you*. No, Hovey, I *don't;* and I want you to answer my questions straight out and promptly, without troubling your head about my *meaning*. Just give the straightforward truth and you've nothing to fear; it's the people who hesitate and are too curious who bring suspicion upon themselves. You're all right, my good man;" and having thus skilfully turned Hovey's thoughts from Miss La Croix to himself and his own best interest, Drexel repeated his question.

"Which was it, parcel or box?"

"A box—or shaped like one, sir."

"And of what size?"

"Well, sir, hi sh'd say habout six, or, maybe, seven inches long, by arf as wide, and as thick as my two 'ands, sir. Has I said, one end of the veil was sort of twisted round, more than arf hidin' it, and the other end was floating loose-like as she moved."

"Was there anything else, Hovey?"

"Honly a 'andkerchief, sir." All Hovey's replies now were marvels of deferential promptness.

"How long did Miss La Croix remain beside the table?"

"Honly a moment, sir. Miss Payne's maid came to the 'ead of the stairs just then, and took her up to the ladies. I 'eard 'er say as they were waiting, and expecting her."

Drexel pondered a moment; he would have been glad to terminate the interview there and then, but wisdom forbade, so he went on through the list of guests, omitting nothing. The footman's answers were precisely what he expected.

The Follingsbees had been met, almost at the door, by the host himself, and had gone straight upstairs with him, not so much as looking upon the fateful table in passing.

Olive and Philip Girard, like the familiar and informal friends that they were, had given their wraps to a maid almost at the drawing-room door, and Dr. Vaughan, quite empty-handed, save for a cluster of roses which he carried with him, and later, presented to Miss Payne—had left his hat and stick in the hands of Hovey himself.

At this point in the investigation, Drexel's face began to show signs of inward disturbance, and he got up and moved about the room restlessly until, when he again turned toward the footman, he was in full command of himself.

"Hovey," he said, abruptly; "what are your duties here?"

"Hat first, sir," said the man, looking a little surprised, "I 'ad to wait at table sometimes, specially hat dinner; but a few months ago, Mr. Lord changed that. Hi was sent for, sir, and told that, in future hi was to look after the visitors and be on duty hat the door, and in the receivin'-'all hall the time."

"Has that been your custom, Hovey?"

"Well, no sir, not quite; I 'av 'ad to wait—more or less, and sometimes gone hout with the carriage."

"Hm! What did Mr. Lord say in explanation of this change?"

"Nothing more than that he would soon 'ave ladies under his roof, and meant to 'ave in one or two new servants. He wanted me to attend to my business, and 'oped I understood that meant to keep out hagents, beggars, and folks that might annoy the ladies. Hi remember," he added, reflectively, "he were *very* particular in his orders habout strangers callin' when he was hout."

"How do you mean?"

"If a stranger called and asked for *him*, without givin' a name, hi was to hask for it, and not announce him or show him up without it."

"Oh—that."

"About letters, too: if anyone brought a letter—any strange person,

mind—hi was to hask who it came from, and the name of the messenger; and I was not to answer questions about him or the ladies—to strangers."

"And so you were on duty at the door all last evening, Hovey?"

"I was, sir."

"And no one came, after the guests?"

"No one, sir."

"And who went out first?"

"Miss La Croix were the first, sir."

"Did you notice her manner particularly?"

For a full moment Hovey was silent; then something in the detective's face seemed to stimulate his speech.

"Miss La Croix, sir, seemed to be in 'aste; she hurried down to the vestibule, and then, missing her veil, I suppose, she turned, ran back, stopped at the table a moment, and, I *think*, put down 'er glove, 'er fan, or somethink, and picked up 'er veil from the floor, before I noticed that she had dropped it, sir."

"Was it not your business to notice such a thing, and to restore it?"

"Certainly, sir; but she came down the stairs very swiftly and the veil must a-slipped down as she came; it was so near the colour of the rug, sir, that I didn't know why she turned back so suddenly, till I saw her take it up."

"Then you didn't *see* it fall?"

"No, sir."

Someone tapped lightly, and then half-opened the door, glanced in, and then entered.

It was Madeline; she looked excited and anxious, but did not speak.

"You may go, Hovey," said Drexel.

When the man was gone, each waited for the other to speak. Finally Madeline asked:

"Have you made a beginning?"

"Perhaps; I hardly know. Are you at my disposal now?"

"For a little while—yes."

"You have seen Mr. Lord?"

"Yes; but he is not permitted to talk. I think there is something that he would like to say if he could; he was anxious to know if anything was being done, and he has made a request."

"Ah!"

"He wants us, if it is possible, to keep this night's work out of the papers. He wants us to let it pass as an *accident*. Do you think it could be managed?"

"We will see. Fortunately, all are friends here. But, Miss Payne, about this little matter?"

"What is it?"

"Nothing difficult. I learn from Hovey that, a little while before your guests began to assemble, a boy came to the door with flowers. He came, strange to say, to the upper door, and Hovey bade him *place the flowers upon the table*."

"Ah!"

"Which he did, retiring at once. Hovey does not describe the boy very accurately, and I wish you would see if some of the other servants may not have caught a glimpse of that same boy. You will know how to do this."

"I will try," she said; and then, after a moment's thought, "Yes, I will manage it, and without loss of time."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONFIDENCES.

THE result of Madeline's investigation below stairs was somewhat startling to both herself and Drexel.

A few adroitly-put questions brought out a statement from one of the women servants, which directly contradicted one of Hovey's.

It concerned the boy from the florist's.

The woman had been standing for some moments near the servants' entrance, the upper door of which was of glass; she was looking, she said, on behalf of cook, who had sent out hastily for something forgotten until almost the last moment; and she was just thinking that she would run out herself, for cook was in a "great bother," when she chanced to see the head of a boy above the area railing; he was carrying something, and at first she fancied it might be cook's condiments, "come in the nick of time;" but a second glance showed her that the boy was loaded down with flowers; he halted just opposite her, and looked up at the house as if in doubt; then something ahead of him, the woman could not see what it was, because of the angle made just there by the big stone steps leading up to the street door, seemed to catch his eye, and he moved forward at a quick pace, and the stone flight hid him from view. It was the boy who had brought the flowers; the woman was sure of that. True, she did not *see* him ascend the front steps, but the flowers were the same, she was sure. Ten minutes before she saw this boy the flowers had not arrived; and going upstairs, not two minutes after—for the cook's messenger had appeared just as the boy with the flower basket passed out of her sight—she found that the flowers were in the dining-room.

That the bearer of the flowers seen by her, and the boy who had placed the basket of flowers upon the table in the reception-hall, were one and the same, the woman had never a doubt. But here the complication began. The eyes of the woman were quick and keen, and she was able to describe the boy.

"He carried the basket straight in front of him," she said, confidently. "He was a slim little fellow, and pale. He was *dressed in black*, and wore a tight little black *cap* on his head."

Neither doubts nor questions could shake her confidence in the evidence of "her own eyes." She adhered to the black clothes and the cap. Being confronted with the footman only made her the more positive. In spite of his affirmation that the boy from the florist's wore a light jacket and "some kind of a *'at*," she clung to the evidence

of "her own *two* eyes"—to the slim boy in the black clothes, and to the black cap.

And here, so far as it concerned Mr. Lord's servants, ended the investigation.

Mrs. Marvin, such was the name of the servant who bore witness to the boy in the black garments, and the cap, was not a woman to be impeached; the more she was questioned, the more voluble and positive she became.

Hovey, on the other hand, while he maintained his belief in the light jacket and the "'*at*," waxed grim and dignified, and withdrew himself as much as possible from the society below stairs.

Up to this time he had been affably condescending to Mrs. Marvin, but now all this was changed. Now they passed each other in a silence that was more eloquent than speech, telling, as it did, of a condition of enforced, but armed, neutrality.

"How do you account for their widely different descriptions," asked Madeline of Drexel. "I confess to some annoyance. For I have believed in both, Hovey and Mrs. Marvin. I don't know *now* which one to doubt."

"Then doubt neither," was his response. "This complication is a trifling one compared to those we are likely to encounter. In due time I shall investigate at the florist's; in the meantime, it will be well for you to keep an eye on both Hovey and the woman."

To keep the truth concerning the explosion and its results out of the newspapers looked, at first glance, like a difficult undertaking; nevertheless, it was accomplished.

The servants were taken in hand by Drexel and Madeline; some of them had not been long in the house, but all had been well treated, and were becoming more or less attached to the inmates. Drexel could be impressive upon occasion; and Madeline was very liberal, while asking their silence as a favour. With the exception of Hovey, who had been despatched after an assistant by Dr. Vaughan, none of them had been out of the house. And when they had closed the door of the library upon the last of them, Madeline and Drexel felt quite secure that, so far as the servants were concerned, there was little to be feared.

In the early morning, Dr. Vaughan, Mr. Follingsbee, Philip Girard, and Roger Drexel took counsel together.

Mrs. Follingsbee was suffering from the blow upon her head, and would for some days; but it was not a dangerous hurt, and it would be quite safe to remove her to her own home that afternoon, or in the early evening.

Mr. Follingsbee's left hand was swathed in bandages, and he had one ugly scar upon his neck; but he made light of these evidently painful souvenirs of Mr. Lord's little dinner, and pronounced himself quite able to baffle inquiry, and account satisfactorily for his injuries.

Mrs. Ralston had not escaped so easily. A bit of flying tow had ignited her light soft garments, and one limb had been severely blistered, while her hands, in catching at her burning draperies, had also been woefully scorched. It would be many days before she could use them again.

It was decided that she be removed to the home of the Girard's, lest the fact that there were two patients in the house give rise to undesirable inquiries. And for two weeks, those who asked for Mrs. Ralston, at Mr. Lord's door, were informed by the obliging Hovey that Mrs. Ralston was absent, and not likely to return for a week or more.

As for Mr. Lord, he lay in his darkened room, swathed in cotton and bandages, beyond recognition. There were wounds and bruises upon chest and shoulders, hands, face, and neck; some serious, and all most painful.

There was good hope of his recovery, and possible danger from fever, inflammation, gangrene; but, should he live to be a centenarian, he would remain a man of many scars to the end of his days.

He was not permitted to talk—rather, he would not have been, had he made the attempt. But, between his wounds and his bandages, talking was both painful and difficult; and he did not readily recover from the dazed mental condition brought about by the shock of the explosion. Added to this, was his weakness from pain and loss of blood. He had made one effort, with some vague ideas of what he should say to Madeline. But she had anticipated him, by whispering that already she had taken steps to get the matter in the hands of a detective, and when she begged him to leave everything to her, and not to exert himself, he was only too glad to close his swollen eyelids, and, whispering his wish to keep the affair out of the newspapers, subside into silence and narcotized rest.

* * * * * *

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, Madeline and Drexel were seated together in the partially-darkened library, talking in low tones. They had been thus occupied for a long hour, and Madeline's face was still alive with the mixed emotions roused by the interview, during which she had been, for the most part, a listener.

"And now," he was saying, as if concluding some narrative, "I think you know everything. At least, I think that you understand me. May I add, we understand each other?"

"If we do not," said Madeline, gravely, "it shall not be my fault. You have given me much to think of, Mr. Drexel. It is a grave responsibility to be put in possession of secrets such as these, but—do not think I regret the necessity which has thrust responsibility upon me. If I were a man, I think, I hope, I should have done what you have done—under the same conditions. I am afraid you think too well of my ability. But, such as it is, you may count on it."

"Thank you," he arose, and put out his hand. "I could ask nothing more. And, now that everything is understood—I will set my agents at work," and he turned to go.

"One moment," she was standing close beside him now, "do not misunderstand me. I see the reason—the necessity for all you have done, and propose to do, but—I have not given up my faith in her. I hope and expect to see her vindicated."

"You are a friend indeed," he replied. "Believe me, I will work for her vindication. Do you not see that the very course we have

adopted will lead to her vindication if she is innocent. Is the only way, in fact?"

"Yes. I see that. And I have already written her, as you suggested. Oh, do not fear for me. Having made up my mind, I can play my part."

"If I had ever doubted that," he said, "we would not be thus in council now."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOINA'S STRUGGLE.

In after days, Moina La Croix could hardly have told just how she passed that long night, after she had heard the footsteps, first of her maid, and then of her father, turn from her door, and die away in the stillness below.

It was a night of bitter grieving, of rebellious sobs and tears, and of little sober thinking.

At last, when the "small hours" were growing large again, as measured by the strokes of a great clock not far away, nature and youth conquered, and she fell asleep.

When she awoke, morning was growing into "the forenoon" for the work-a-day world. The sun shone broadly in at her windows, and the sounds of strong active life came loudly up from the street.

As she opened her eyes, she experienced, for an instant only, a sense of languor quite new to her, and a feeling of vague discontent. She lifted herself upon a supple elbow, and looked about her, and then, suddenly, there burst upon her now awakened memory all the pain and grief and dire forebodings of the previous night.

She half arose, and listened for sounds from below. The house was as silent as if all its inmates were still sleeping.

She dropped back upon her pillow for a moment, and then sprang up quickly, rang her bell, turned the key in the lock, and went back to her bed. As she was about to lie down again, a sudden thought sends her hurrying to a mirror, where she looks ruefully at her pale cheeks, and sighs, and turns away to draw the curtains, and shut out all but a faint gleam of the golden morning light.

Before she has resumed her recumbent attitude, Margot is at the door.

"Margot," she begins, hurriedly, "I am not coming down this morning. I do not feel fit—no—you need not bring me anything. I will ring by and by. Tell papa——"

"Monsieur is not yet up," Margot manages to say, "he, too, is indisposed——"

Moina is out of bed in a trice.

"Ill—papa!"

"No, not *ill*, mademoiselle, just tired. He told me to say to you that he was tired after last night's exertions. And that you must not be anxious."

"You saw him, Margot, tell me, does he look ill?"

"I do not think he is *ill*, ma'm'selle. He looks pale, and I think it is as he says. I think he is weary—no more."

Moina turns back to her couch.

"Then you may go, Margot, I want nothing. I think I shall come down soon, after a little more—a little—nap. Open me a window, please, Margot, and—that is all."

The window is opened, and Margot shuts out the one tiny ray of sunlight. Moina flings herself at length upon her couch, and closes her eyes, clasping her hands tightly over them, and lying thus for some moments.

Presently she sighs heavily, withdraws her hands, and looks about her. The room is cool, already filled with the fresh morning's breath; the air—there is a brisk breeze outside—stirs and lifts the curtains, varying the light, and deepening the shadows. Moina draws a long shuddering sigh, and turns her face toward the moving curtains, settling herself among her pillows—not to rest, but to think.

It seems to her that the Moina of yesterday and the Moina of now are a lifetime apart. Yesterday she was serious, busy, yes, *anxious*—about a silken gown. To-day—her heart is like lead in her bosom; silken gowns are as naught. And what has wrought this swift change?

Just a doubt. All the more hideous, because it is so vague, so ill-defined. And because it threatens her life-long faith, and trust, and reliance in—*her—father*.

Last night she was stunned, shocked. She was weak, she tells herself, and childish. To-day she is calm, or she *will be* calm; and she will think, and be sure of herself, before she meets him.

Ah, Moina La Croix, yours is not the first soul to be shocked, to despair, and rebel at being suddenly forced from your charming, mystical, far-off views of the ideal (all the more charming *because* so far away and mystical), and set face to face with the real, the near, and the *now*.

How beautiful it has seemed to her, all this vision of rehabilitation, of a world made new and purified by the bands of united lovers of their fellow-men all over the universe! How proud she had been to know her father as a leader in this great new crusade. How she had gloried in this last effort of his; in their coming to this new world, to help save it, and make freedom yet more free.

She had never asked herself how this great liberation was to be accomplished. Was not the onward march of a mighty and ever-increasing brotherhood enough; would not all men flock to their standard, when the new light shone in upon their darkened minds?

She had heard, yes, and *talked* quite eloquently, of the "creation of public sentiment," of "co-operation," and the "mutual good." How she had revelled in these glittering generalities.

Moina was her father's child; but in her the hot southern blood, and glowing artistic temperament, was tempered by a strain of practical English; and gradually this began to stir in her veins, bringing to her her first consoling thought.

Heretofore, she had taken her ideas from her father; had seen through his eyes; the eyes of an enthusiast, an idealist.

Suddenly she sprang up, and began a hasty toilet. She could not move fast enough, and she did not want Margot.

Her eyes were humid, her cheeks flushing.

How plain it all seemed to her now. Her father was *not* a plotter. He *was* an Evangelist. It was not *he* who had planned these horrible things, this burning of property, this terrorism. It was that wretch Crashaw. And her father was innocent of it all; innocent and ignorant.

And last night she would not see him; that dear, high-minded, clear-souled papa. Last night she had presumed to sit in judgment upon him—*she!*

But she would see him—*now!* And it could not be quick enough! Suddenly she paused, with one thin slipper half on.

What should she say to him? Would she dare speak of Crashaw? question him? warn him? Just then a shrill voice beneath her window caused her to start and let the slipper fall unheeded.

"Mornin' pa—pers! All about the big *strike!* Shocking affair! Mills closed down! Soldiers called—*out!* All about the str—*ike!* Big meeting of so—oh—*list!*"

The voice ended in an ear-splitting upward note. Another newsboy would have understood that the shrieker had been hailed by a customer.

Moina flew to the window. It was Margot, upon the doorstep, who had beckoned the boy towards her; she was holding out her hand for a paper.

"Margot," called down Moina, "get *all* of them; one of *each*." Margot nodded, and Moina withdrew from the window. A new thought had seized upon her mind, driving out all else.

She would know for herself, she would read the papers, she would study the question of socialism in its American aspect, and she would *not* speak to her father about those names, those lists of names where, against some of them, a blue cross stood pencilled. Yes, she would *know*, and however she might learn to doubt Crashaw, yes, and Savorin, and the brotherhood itself, she would *not* doubt her father.

"It's his *religion*," she murmured, as she prepared to leave her chamber, "it's his religion, and he lives up to it, not down."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HIS THREE WARNINGS.

FOR four days Mr. Lord lay secluded from all save doctors and nurse. On the fourth, he began to fret under the restraint put upon him, and, on the morning of the fifth, some of the confining bandages were removed, and their replacement pronounced unnecessary.

"You have much to contend with," Dr. Vaughan said to him. "If I could foresee just how you would behave through it all, I might foretell your complete recovery. As it is——"

"Well?" articulated his patient, with much difficulty and more asperity.

"As it is—I see that you are going to be very uneasy and inclined to fidgets. That won't be good for you."

"Look here," said the sick man, "I want to see Miss Payne. Prop me up somehow, and give me something to ease or numb this smarting. If I can talk with her for twenty minutes, I'll get something off my mind that won't let me rest, and then you can have your chance."

Dr. Vaughan, knowing his man, was not slow to comply with this demand.

"Is it not too soon?" asked Madeline, who had just returned from an early visit to Mrs. Ralston.

"It's our best chance, I think. It will exhaust him to talk, and he will find himself the worse for it to the extent of a bad night, and probably an increase of pain to-morrow. But we must keep down fever at any cost, and he won't be at ease until he has seen you, and said his say. In his condition, mental worry is pretty sure to mean fever."

"Then I had better see him?" she said. "I will try to do *my* share of the talking. There are some matters that he confided to me—shortly before this accident. I suppose he wants to hear my report."

Madeline felt some constraint in saying this, some delicacy and hesitation at the thought of turning out Dr. Vaughan, who was an older friend than herself, and who would seem to have a right to the banker's confidence. It occurred to her once to suggest to Mr. Lord that he be made acquainted with the facts as to the warning letters, and then the thought of Drexel came up. He, too, was a close friend to Dr. Vaughan. And *his* wishes she already knew.

There was another reason, too, why Madeline, if put to the test, would have hesitated and drawn back at the thought of suggesting Clarence Vaughan as worthy to be made one at their councils, but this reason she would not admit, even to herself.

"When am I to come?" she asked.

"Not for an hour, or perhaps two. His hurts must first be dressed, and then he must have a short rest, and time for his easing potion to take effect. Say an hour and a half."

"Two hours?" suggested she.

"Will that suit you better?"

"Yes."

"Then it shall be two." He came nearer, and scrutinized her face closely. "Miss Payne, you don't look quite yourself. Have you not been abusing your strength these few days past?"

"I might put that question to *you*, Dr. Vaughan. Do you *ever* sleep?"

"I do, every night, and a little, a short nap, almost every day."

"Every night!" she asked. "How *much* every night?"

"Oh, you must not press me too closely. I am trained and hardened to this sort of thing. I can assure you, too, that I consider it a duty to take good care of my physical self."

"I am glad of that," she said, quickly, and then flushed absurdly, and added, with hasty irrelevance, "I have been to see Mrs. Ralston."

"And you found her doing well?"

"Thanks to you, yes. She is only anxious about Mr. Lord now. She is in excellent hands."

"She would have been in excellent hands here," he said, smiling.

"Yes—yours."

"And *yours*."

Madeline made a sudden forward movement. They had met and were conversing in the reception-hall.

"I—pardon me, I—have a message, a letter to write before I see Mr. Lord. You are coming back soon?"

"Yes," he had grown suddenly grave, and he now bowed quite formally, and hastened away.

As the door closed heavily Madeline turned as if to look after him, and then with a little fluttering half sigh turned again and entered the library, where, seated at Mr. Lord's desk, she wrote the following message to Roger Drexel.

"*Mr. Lord is to receive me to-day, in two hours or less. If possible come before that time.*"

They had been looking forward to this interview, and Drexel wished if it could be arranged to be present. But it was no part of his plan to make himself known to Mr. Lord as "Hurst the detective."

He was prompt to answer her summons, coming up the steps just as Dr. Vaughan, having completed his task and administered the soothing draught, was coming down.

The two men stopped, shook hands, and exchanged inquiries.

"How is the patient?"

"Better, I think, but inclined to fret. I have consented to his talking to Miss Payne a little, he seemed to make a point of it. But he sees no other visitors."

Drexel smiled. "Is that meant for me?" he asked.

"Was it needed?" the doctor's answering smile was somewhat constrained.

"Well, not greatly, my visit is to Miss Payne."

For a moment the eyes of the two men met smilingly, then as each went his way Drexel's became instantly grave and absorbed, while those of Clarence Vaughan wore a look of pain.

Madeline, standing at a drawing-room window, saw the meeting and the parting of the two, unseen by either, and she saw, too, the face of each as they turned away.

"Can anything have come between them?" she thought, "oh, I hope not!" and then she sighed.

* * * * * *

When Madeline appeared at his bedside Mr. Lord made an effort to smile through his bandages, and to put out a burned and poulticed hand.

She took the hand in both her own and laid it gently back upon its cushion, drawing her chair close beside the bed and smiling down upon him.

"I want to tell you something," he began huskily, "but, first—have you done anything?"

"You are not to talk too much, the doctor says," she replied, "and I may talk a great deal. I want very much to tell you *what* has been done, for I think we have done a little."

"We?" he questioned.

"Of course, I could not get very far alone, and I hope you will approve of what I did. You expected me to do *something*, did you not?"

"Yes," with his eager eyes fixed upon her fair face, "I did."

"Thank you. When I found that you had been injured, perhaps fatally, by a missile—an infernal machine, clandestinely introduced into your own house, I felt as if I could not wait a moment. As I think of that night from this distance, I am sure that I *must* have had an inspiration, for the very moment we were both at liberty I called Mr. Drexel aside and asked his help. You don't want the details now, just the facts?"

"The facts, yes," eagerly.

"I told him that I wanted him to help me in securing a skilful detective."

"Drexel?"

"Yes, Drexel, I think you will be surprised, prepare for it. Mr. Drexel is well acquainted with the Chief of Police, and between them we have secured the services of—I wonder if you have ever heard of him?"

"Of whom?"

"Of a detective called *Hurst*."

"Heard of *Hurst!* I should think so! You don't mean to tell me——"

"That we will have the assistance of Mr. Hurst? Yes, but I *do*. Mr. Hurst is already hard at work upon the case."

Mr. Lord was silent for some seconds, then asked,

"Have you seen him?"

Madeline started. "Seen Mr. Hurst do you mean? Mr. Drexel has kindly acted for me—it has been made very easy for me—between them."

Drexel had made plain to Madeline his reasons for not wishing to be identified with Detective Hurst in the mind of Mr. Lord.

"It won't do," he had said, "setting aside all my other reasons, it won't do to tell him this now. He may grow worse, become delirious, who knows. If he were well we might safely trust him with our very lives if need be, but now—it won't do."

Realizing the truth of this argument, and anticipating some complication like this of the present moment, she had sent for Drexel, who, being anxious to see Mr. Lord, was only too glad to come.

"What do you think of him?" persisted the sick man, seeming not to have noticed her evasion.

"I think he will solve our mystery if the solution is possible. Mr. Lord, I wish you would let me call Mr. Drexel, he is in the library. He will tell you what has been done so much better than I can, and he communicates direct with Mr. Hurst. Of course it wouldn't do for a detective to be seen coming here. Mr. Hurst thinks it likely that your house is being watched constantly."

"Yes, I dare say." Mr. Lord seemed little affected by this supposition. "Wait a minute."

He closed his eyes, and seemed to be thinking, moving his head

once or twice from side to side, and making some inarticulate sounds expressive, it seemed to his companion, of doubt, or dissatisfaction.

Finally he said :

"Call Drexel, then."

When the two were seated beside his bed, and very near it, he said, with his eyes on the latest comer—

"The doctor says I am not to talk more than I can help. Drexel, you must know that I appreciate your interest in myself and my disreputable adventures. I suppose you have been told——"

"I have told him about those letters, if you mean that," broke in Madeline. "I thought it was necessary."

"Of course," assented the sick man. Then, turning again to Drexel, "And you have constituted yourself a means of communication between this young lady here, and the notable Mr. Hurst?"

"I happen to know Hurst very well," replied Drexel, modestly, "and as I am quite a frequent guest here, he thought it would be the wisest course. Hurst is very rigid in his ways. He would not, on any account, come here again, even in disguise."

"Again?" queried Mr. Lord.

"Yes, he has inspected the premises in order to learn, if possible, by what means the box was introduced into the house."

"Oh."

"I am sorry to say that nothing came of it."

"And the servants?"

"Miss Payne took care to have them out of the way."

"And has nothing been done then, or learned?"

"Very little, I am sorry to say; and yet as much as was to be expected. No doubt, the instigators of this attack upon you, fully expected it to create a sensation. We have contrived to keep it all out of the papers, it is generally presumed that you are suffering from malaria, or fever. Possibly, the rascals thought by this attack upon you, to intimidate others in high places. It's their first blow at your organization, Mr. Lord, I hope it may be the last."

The eyes of the sick man expressed considerable surprise.

"What do *you* know of our organization?" he asked, brusquely.

"A little, chiefly through Hurst."

"And what does Mr. Hurst think of the situation?"

"That it is most unpleasant. That you have made yourself a strong secret enemy in some manner, perhaps several of them. That you will, when you recover, do well to guard yourself carefully, not only your goings in and out, but your speech and actions."

"Umph! Only wait until I get out of this," growled the amiable invalid.

"In the meantime, however, we hope to learn something more about these plotters, before you have an opportunity to run the gauntlet of their malice. Miss Payne is on the defensive here, and understands her part of the game thoroughly. And now would you like to hear the little that we have learned?"

"Yes, of course."

Drexel glanced at Madeline, and then, in quick, graphic sentences, told of the discoveries concerning the florist's messenger, and the

difference in the testimony of the footman, Hovey, and the woman, Mrs. Marvin.

"Upon visiting the florist," Drexel said, "it appears, unfortunately, that, on the day in question, they were more than usually crowded with orders for dinner flowers, and in the hurry of getting out belated orders, things got somewhat out of their regular line. As a result, no one remembers what particular messenger was sent with your order, and, what seems a trifle strange, the boys themselves, when called up and questioned, all declare their ignorance concerning the matter. In short, if the boy who brought the flowers is among those in the employ of the florist, he, for some reason, has denied all knowledge of the facts."

"And what has our detective done about all this?" demanded Mr. Lord.

"He has put a very keen-witted boy, of his own training, among the florist's delivery boys. He has set a watch upon both Mrs. Marvin and your man, Hovey, and other men are employed in looking up the past of each of these two; in fact, *all* your servants, who, by the way, seem to be honest and respectable above the average, are under *surveillance*."

The injured man turned uneasily upon his pillow. He was very pale, and showed signs both of fatigue and excitement.

"I think," he said, slowly, "I must have some more of those drops. Is Vaughan in the house?"

"I will see," said Madeline, rising hastily, and without a glance towards Drexel. She was thoroughly alarmed at the change in the sick man's face.

Dr. Vaughan, who, while he knew nothing of the subject of the interview between his patient and Madeline, still felt anxious that it should not be prolonged, and had returned a second time to the house, came at once with Madeline.

"Vaughan," began Mr. Lord, speaking with difficulty, "you must give me another drop of that cordial, I must say something more, and don't remonstrate," seeing the look of displeasure upon the doctor's face. "And *you* must stay and hear me too. I can't explain—I'll leave that to our friends here."

Dr. Vaughan looked from one to the other with grave concern, felt the pulse of the patient, prepared the desired cordial, and brought it to the bedside in silence.

"If you keep this up twenty minutes longer, Mr. Lord," he said, "I won't answer for the consequences. Drink this," and he raised the patient's head, and held the medicine glass to his lips.

"It won't take ten," Mr. Lord said, after a moment of silence, during which Madeline and Drexel exchanged glances, while the doctor kept his eyes scrupulously turned from them both.

"You must stay, Vaughan."

"I mean to stay," said the doctor, grimly. "Now, Mr. Lord, get it over."

"Put your hand under my pillow, Vaughan—there, that's the place—get my keys." They were drawn from their hiding place. "Give them to Miss Payne."

Madeline took the bunch of keys in wondering silence.

"Now, Miss Payne, please unlock the safe, there beside the fireplace. The keys are numbered. The brass one is first. There's a long, narrow, rosewood box there, bring that."

All were silent while Madeline unlocked the safe, and brought the rosewood box to the bedside.

"Open it, Drexel."

Drexel took the box from Madeline's hand, and pressed upon the light spring that fastened it.

"Take them out," whispered Mr. Lord. "Look at them, all of you."

Drexel took out first a wrinkled letter, which he put into Madeline's hand, and next a long, slender, keen-edged dagger.

"That dagger," said Mr. Lord, "I found pinning the letter there, to the head of my bed. It was placed there while I lay under it, asleep, more than seven months ago. You see, don't you, *I have had my three warnings.*"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DAGGER IN THE WOOD.

AND then, as rapidly, and in as few words as possible, he told them the story of that night.

"I can't answer questions, now," he said, in conclusion. "The man was tall and muscular, well-knit, I should say, though his form was much muffled in the awkward dress that he wore. His voice was a good firm bass, not harsh, nor unpleasant. I think he was not so rough and uncouth of speech as he would have had me believe. He made several slips in his language. They've been watching me all along, there's no doubt of it."

Vaughan and Drexel both arose, as if by one impulse.

"This is very important," said the latter. "But you have said quite enough. Good-bye, for the present, Mr. Lord," he nodded toward the doctor, and turned to leave the room.

Madeline bent over the couch, and murmured in the sick man's ear, "Shall I go?" He looked an assent, and she bent her head as she passed Dr. Vaughan, and followed Drexel.

Outside he turned, and waited for her. It was a very serious gaze that encountered hers.

"What does it mean?" she asked. Her manner was pre-occupied; she seemed ill at ease.

"It means much. It is worse than I feared."

"Worse!" she put out her hand and grasped his arm. "What is it? Come down to the library, come."

While she spoke the door of the sick-room opened noiselessly, and Dr. Vaughan came out.

Madeline withdrew her hand quickly.

"Pardon me," said Vaughan, somewhat stiffly, "I am looking for the nurse. Ah!" as the woman came out from an opposite chamber, the door of which had been standing ajar, "come, Mrs. Powers." And he was about to re-enter the sick-room.

"Doctor," said Madeline, "one moment. Is he—have we made him worse?"

"I hope not, Miss Payne; but he needs instant attention."

"You will remain?"

"As long as I am needed." He bowed again, and held the door open for the nurse, entering after her, and closing it without a backward glance.

Without further words, Madeline led the way to the library.

"Now," she said, turning upon Drexel as soon as the door had been closed behind them, "What is it? What does it mean?"

"It means this. Mr. Lord has been tried, found guilty, and condemned."

"*Tried!* by whom, and for what?"

"Tried by the most powerful secret society on the face of the globe. Condemned, because, after being warned, Mr. Lord has chosen to go on as before, to let their warning pass unheeded. He has been put upon the black list of a powerful society—a society with emissaries, tools, everywhere. At first, upon reading those two letters, I thought it might not be—the worst. That Mr. Lord had incurred the displeasure of some local order; or, perhaps, a group of his own employees, who had hoped to gain something, a concession, or, perhaps, re-instatement, by a course of intimidation. I even fancied that their missile had done more damage than was at first intended. That it was not *meant* to kill—but now."

"Now—and what now?"

"Now I am able to recognize our enemies. And it is my duty to tell you that they are dangerous and powerful. Heavens! I wish I had not drawn you into this!"

"You?—drawn *me* into—well! Mr. Drexel, you forget, do you not? that, but for you, I would now be fighting in the dark—and with insufficient weapons; while now I have the help of *Mr. Hurst.* And I know what that is worth."

"Nevertheless, you would be safer without it; Miss Payne, I wish you would withdraw from this matter altogether. Leave it to me."

"And why? Have you discovered that I can be of no use to you? A clog, perhaps?"

"No, that is folly. It is of your safety I am thinking. Upon the slightest suspicion that you and I are engaged in thwarting their plans, we shall be surrounded with spies. Should it become known that Drexel and Hurst are one, you, as the friend of Drexel, are in danger. They would treat you ruthlessly. Nothing that they can destroy will be permitted to stand in their way. Of course, Mr. Lord must not know this—*yet.* And he need not know that you are not acting with me. Leave it to me, and you will be safe enough."

Madeline drew herself up, grandly erect, and haughty.

"Mr. Drexel, if you were to withdraw—and, if there is any such thing, you are the *one* to withdraw—I would still hold to my purpose. If such powerful enemies to society are really in existence, every means should be tried to bring them to justice; but it seems incredible; we are not in Russia!"

"No; we are *not* in Russia. We are in a land so broad and free,

that it welcomes to its shores, offers a home and the protection of its flag, to every refugee, assassin, political offender, escaped convict, banished intriguer! Every form of vice and degradation that can no longer find harbour in its own country, comes to ours! And here, as there, breeds strife and iniquity. And of this class, the more intelligent, almost to a man, become leaders among the social agitators; while the lower strata swell the ranks. We are not in Russia no! We are in America—bestowing the gifts of free speech, and the 'liberty of the press,' upon men so dangerous that even Russia, with all her secret police, her jails, her spies, and her Siberia, will not—dare not—keep them at large within her borders. These are the men who, within a few years, have turned our before harmless leagues and unions into festering sores; who are making socialism, once little more than another name for republicanism, a curse and a huge menace to the peace and welfare of our nation. But—pardon me, Miss Payne; I am haranguing you. I confess that I have been startled—stirred up. I wish you were out of this house."

"Where would you advise me to go, Mr. Drexel?"

He caught the gleam of her eye, and the ring of sarcasm in her voice. But he was quite beyond sarcasm; outside of the conventional pale.

"I can't even answer *that*," he said. "I can't, at this moment, so much as name a place where you will be safe. If—if the danger I fear——"

"Fear—you!"

He came closer, and took both her hands firmly in his.

"I *fear* for *you*, Madeline Payne. If I had dreamed that Mr. Lord's enemies were what they are—I would *never* have permitted you to take one step with me. I would have prevented—have kept you from having any part in, or knowledge of, these things, at any cost."

"Really! you must consider yourself all-powerful!—even for Mr. Hurst, *that* might have been difficult."

"Mr. Hurst is accustomed to difficulties," he said, grimly. "But we are wasting too many words."

"Precisely my opinion. Sit down, Mr. Drexel, and let *me* say a few words. It appears that we do not quite understand each other *yet*." She set the example by seating herself.

"I can understand, *now*," she went on, "precisely why Mr. Lord trusted me with such an important secret. At first, I confess, it seemed to me a little strange. It is this dagger and the nocturnal visit, that has been upon his mind, rather than the anonymous letters; *they* may have added a little to the anxiety he must have felt ever since he received the visit, but, *alone*, they would not have been enough to cause him to take the step that he did."

"I believe you are right."

"If those two letters had been the sole cause for uneasiness he would have dismissed them from his mind as unworthy a second thought; or, if he took action, it would have been to turn the matter over to the police."

"Yes."

"But the dagger? *That* letter. He must have reasoned about them somewhat like this. You see, this warning came at the very beginning, before this new protection league was fairly organised, fully in working order. If he made the fact of this visit known, it might weaken their new society, might intimidate some, perhaps affect *his* position as an officer or member. He has a stubborn will, you know. Probably he intended to keep this visit a secret altogether. I think, too, that it may have made a stronger impression upon him than he would be willing to admit."

"Quite natural, that."

"Yes. Quite natural. Now, when that first letter of warning came—the first after the one with the dagger, I mean."

"Of course." Drexel was listening very attentively.

"It set him to thinking afresh. It was too late to confide in his partners or the members of the league then, or he thought it too late. But he began to see a possibility of danger to himself. See, now, the character of the man; he is facing the danger doggedly: has been from the first; but, by and by, the thought comes to him, 'If they should kill me in some secret way, and I have held my tongue to the last, the rascals will go scot free;' and that thought would decide him."

"Upon my word! I believe you are right in every particular," Drexel broke in.

"Thanks. Then he casts about for a confidant. Naturally, he prefers to keep his secret under his own roof. Mrs. Ralston won't do, she has nerves. There remains—myself. It was 'Hobson's choice,' you see. But even so, he *did* choose me, and I accepted his confidence—accepted the charge it placed upon me; and this brings me back to the starting-point; when I first asked for your aid and advice, you were good enough to express some confidence in my ability and courage. We recognized *some* danger from the first, I think."

"Certainly; but not——"

"But now, this story of the midnight visitor and dramatic warning, with a dagger for emphasis, causes you to turn suddenly upon me, as if I had recently lost all value as your assistant and confidant, and ask me to retire and let you cope with these new dangers alone; you warn me that you are very dangerous company."

"And so I am. *Most* dangerous, from this new point of view."

"But don't you see that I *can't* withdraw, if I would. Mr. Lord depends upon *me;* we can't go to him and say, 'Your danger is so great that Miss Payne must withdraw for her own safety.' I can't leave the house and hide from—I don't know what or whom! I *won't*, there! Suppose Mr. Lord should die? as he may. Do you think I could respect myself, with his murderers unpunished? No, Mr. Drexel, let us not waste more words over this; unless you, having given me your promise, withdraw it, leaving me to fight this mystery alone—and I *will* fight it alone; if you abandon me, things must remain as at first. After what you have told me of yourself, and you reasons for taking the position you now occupy, of course, I compre-

hend when you say that the danger has *increased tenfold.* And now I will confess to you that it would be very hard for me to give up this work. I *can't* give it up ; I feel intensely interested, and more eager to take an active part than you can imagine. Don't talk to me about danger, but since the danger has increased, let my work increase, too. I withdraw all restrictions ; consider me a female detective, thirsting for honour and glory in my profession. Don't make me merely a repository of secrets, a go-between ; let me help—let me *work!*"

And so this pair, two arrayed against an unknown quantity, ratified anew their compact, and then and there began to arrange afresh their plans for the defence of the helpless sick man above stairs.

"One question," said Madeline, as he was about to go ; "I think everything else is clear to me. Are you quite certain that dagger and accompaniments may not have been placed there by some power other than that you believe to be so dangerous ; may it not——"

"I understand," he broke in. "But don't indulge in a hope of that sort. The 'dagger in the wood' is not an original device," he added ; "a burglar might have resorted to such a ruse to cover up his real purpose."

"What—you *think so?*"

"Or some novel-reading emissary of a lesser combination might have resorted to the plan. I should have attached no more weight to the letter of the dagger than to the other letters, if it had not been for *the dagger itself.*"

"The—dagger—itself!"

"Yes. It was *not* an ordinary weapon."

"I—I don't understand."

"It is the dagger used by the most dangerous order in the universe ; it is almost a death-warrant. *I have reason to know that dagger.*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"A CRYPTOGRAM."

"MY DEAR VAUGHAN,—Does the sight of these hieroglyphics take you back a few years, and bring vividly to your memory the long cosy winter evenings when we two, overlooked occasionally, and helped a very little, by Philip G—, undertook to unravel what seemed to us then the most intricate of intricacies : a mystery almost past solving. The secret cipher invented and used by 'slippery Joe Dilks,' and his pals ; that quartette of evil doers, now happily extinct? What a sudden retribution that was. Unlovely were they in life : in death not long divided. An execution, a suicide : death from a policeman's bullet—a veritable 'discharge of duty,' and death from exposure—all within three months, and *exeunt* the 'slippery Joe' quartette.

"When you and I had mastered the secret of the cipher, we laughed in self-derision at its simplicity; once the key-note—rather the key-number—was found, goodness knows it was a meaningless and baffling collection of letters, figures, dashes, and dots, until then.

And we wondered jestingly if *we* should ever have need to communicate with each other by means of it.

"That was not so very long ago; and now, here am I obliged—yes, *obliged*—to address to you, in this self-same cipher, words that I would not risk—that I *dare not* commit to plain English upon paper. If all goes well, my cipher 'confession' will never reach you, and then I may venture some day to *say* to you, face to face, what I am here committing to hieroglyphics, and the hands of a fair friend for your use, if needs must.

"I hope that the need may not come, for, if this MS. ever comes to you, it will mean that I am in trouble, that *I need your help*. And that will mean, perhaps, risk and danger for yourself.

"But enough of unintelligible preface. If this is placed in your hands by the bravest, best, and most wonderful woman in the world, you will read it once, twice, as many times as is needful to make all clear to your understanding, and then you will destroy it, cipher as it is.

"And now—when I went abroad a few years ago, you wondered, with many other good friends on this side the ocean, at my long sojourn in foreign lands. In a letter sent me at Moscow, I think, you expressed surprise that a young man of my 'ability and active temperament' should be content with mere globe-trotting when every place must be a vain repetition, and the whole was a 'mere objectless shifting from place to place.' How could you know, from such random letters as I saw fit to send to my friends in those days, that I had found, or thought I had, an 'object,' absorbing, fascinating? 'Grand and noble' I called it then, and believed myself allied to the greatest cause that man ever lived or died for, and associated with men whose names would, sooner or later, be written 'high up on the fair roll of honour and fame.'

"This is not the place, nor have I the time, to dwell upon details. It is the old story of a young man's enthusiasm, beginning in his acquaintance with enthusiasts not so young, but fiery, eloquent, and believing, some of them, believing to the utmost in what they professed. To become aroused, stirred, moved to madness almost, over the wrongs of a down-trodden long-suffering peasantry, is not difficult in Russia, France, Italy, even in England, if one contemplates them long enough, and under the right (or the wrong) conditions, viz., the tutelage and constant companionship of a fiery champion.

"Beginning in France, and ending in Italy, I became a convert to a new plan of evangelization. Not all in a moment. I had my American ideas, and some strongly-rooted prejudices against organized secret societies, except such as have their foundation in the moral or social welfare of the associated—*i.e.*, our clubs and lodges. 'Milk and water' I soon learned to call them.

"I had grown intimate with an Irish-English journalist, an eccentric fellow, but with a keen wit and an eloquent tongue, genial, companionable, and wonderfully magnetic. It was surprising to me in those days how much he, at his age, had contrived to learn about the politics of nations, the internal machinery of governments. He had a persuasive and finally-convincing tongue.

"Little by little I began to realize how all Europe is honeycombed

with secret societies; how these, begun separately, had gradually grown toward each other, joined hands and united issues, until they were growing a power beyond belief. The first step is simple, practical, with nothing to shock the prejudices, everything to arouse the sympathies of chevalier natures; and the onward march is fascinating. For more than two years I was held bound by the spell.

"I will tell you how the change was wrought. I had gone on from grade to grade—and they are many—and had been introduced to some choice spirits who dwell near the innermost shrine. I was devoured with curiosity, eager to rise, eager to learn. I was picked out to do a certain work, and in doing it *I had to see too much*, to learn something of how this great complicated machine was kept oiled and perfectly running. I am not able to explain. I cannot think of that time without a shudder. I had gone so far that there was no going back. I had learned so much that, not for the sake of the society, but for my own sake, for the sake of humanity, I must know more. I had used my wits for *them*. I now began to use them for myself. At first, I confess, I hardly thought beyond the present determination to know the full power for good and evil vested in that inner circle; but the knowledge once gained, the decision was inevitable. I would not be a tool, even of the upper grade. I would stand aloof and watch the revolutions of the wheels within wheels; and sometime, perhaps, I might be able to save some hot head from going beyond his depth and being swallowed up by one or another of those ruthless 'upper' and 'inner' circles. In the first days of my enthusiasm I had made one or two converts. For these I felt responsible. I felt as if I could never let them out of sight. When I came back to New York, I plunged into the law, feeling the need of some absorbing occupation; finished my course, and might have settled down to commonplaceness as a barrister, but for the unrest bred in me by experience abroad, and by the slow awakening within me of a talent which might, perhaps, have remained dormant, but for the quickening and development it had received in the course of my experience with the brotherhood in other lands.

"One fine day—you no doubt remember the circumstance—I took down my shingle and—became—an idler, my disappointed friends say. No, Vaughan, I did *not* become an idler: I took my best, perhaps my only talent, and put it to usury. I became *a detective*—I became *Detective Hurst*.

"And now, for such information as she can give, I refer you to Miss Payne. She knows that for some time I have been occupied in studying the movements of that ever-increasing body of men, revolutionists all, who call themselves socialists, anarchists, leaguers—a variety of names, all meaning the same in kind, with an admitted difference in degree, a difference which will be of little importance when the great outbreak comes, if it is permitted to come.

"And here let me tell you what I know of these people.

"First, they are far stronger, numerically, than is generally supposed, and they are growing stronger daily. Their ranks are swelled considerably by our disaffected home labourers, and more disaffected idlers, and *immensely* by the constant influx of foreign fire-eaters, who

have acted their great specialty once too often at home, and now come to us to re-enact their rôle and make converts among their countrymen here. Sooner or later these miscreants will make their influence felt, and then, unless we are prompt to act, and some of them are taught to respect the laws of a free country, they will become, they have become, a constant menace to law and order in every city where they 'most do congregate.'

"Second, there has been for some time a movement on foot to draw together the various societies of labourers, mechanics, etc., to bind them by a common interest, so that all may act in concert. And this movement *is a success*, as our government may learn to its cost if the amalgamating process is allowed to continue too long.

"Third, the majority of these people, many of them well-meaning, but mis-led and, in most cases, uninformed, are *not* aware that they form what is known to the *initiated*, viz., those above them, as *the outer circle*, and that this circle is *not* fully informed as to the objects and methods of their leaders. The chief officers of this *outer circle* are, for the most part, members, *not officers*, of the *second circle*. And above them are other grades.

"Fourth, the brains, the hands that move the machinery, are not *known* to the lower circles; but here, in New York, *now*, to-day, are agents and agencies sent over from Europe; not beggarly mouthing orators, lodging in tenements, but men of brains, experience, ability; revolutionists, high salaried, caring, indeed, nothing for money, drawing, as they do, upon a purse filled by a dozen nations. These upper circles are composed, for the most part, of four or five members, *never* of a large number. The upper grades are *all* limited as to numbers. *These* decide what blows shall be struck, and where, and when, and how. They are laying out an organized campaign against capital.

"They condemn factories, bring about strikes. *They have their black lists.*

"Of late they have been startled in this section by the discovery through their spies of the existence of the new organization of capital in its own defence. They have seen visions of a standing army, Gatling guns, etc., owned and controlled by capitalists, and they are bent upon intimidation. Capitalists are men, they have but one life apiece, they must be *terrified* into a withdrawal from this society, it must be crippled, broken up, before the standing army has been mustered and the Gatling guns turned against them.

"I cannot tell you how I know these things. I cannot bid you make them known to others. *You must not.* Madeline may tell you why.

"And this I must bring to an end. If I have drawn it to a tedious length, remember it will never meet your eye while I am in possession of life *and liberty*. It is written and left in trust for you, so that if I fail, if I am no longer able to communicate with the one who will then present it to you, you may, as I know you will, take my place and aid her in such work as will still, perhaps, remain to be done.

"When you have read this letter and heard her story, you will

understand all. You will know, too, why I have written you some things which she does not know, and left others for her telling. Hear her story, but *do* not make her acquainted with this version of mine.

"For example, she will tell you the story of the dagger. I have told her that the weapon bears the private mark of the society, and that it means, in the case of Mr. Lord, danger to him—*a threat.* I *tell you the truth.* Wherever that dagger is found, *it is a death-warrant.*

"That Lord's life has been once attempted, you know.

"It is my present purpose to save him, if possible; but that is not all. There are others that I am trying to protect, and to do this there is but one way—to wipe out utterly this select circle on this side of the water, for without the head the hands are not to be feared. It is my purpose to drive out of the country, or out of the world, a quartette, more or less, of men who sit behind the scenes and plot destruction, using as tools the needs of some, the greed of others, hunger, cold, vice, idleness, envy, all the worst passions of men, wrought upon by specious oratory; but not depending upon these alone when a man like Elias Lord has been condemned *by the dagger.*

"Old friend, I go upon a dangerous mission. I have set my house in order. But I hope to come back; not, however, until I have undone the wrong done myself and my country in an hour of rash ill-directed enthusiasm by allying myself to the ranks of the mistaken, who look for the millennium at the hands of their leaders, and not—at their Maker's hands.

"When you have read these pages, and heard what Miss Payne may then have to tell, it will remain for you to act—at your own discretion. I say no more, and am, in this life or another,

"Your friend and brother,

"ROGER DREXEL."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISSING, A BOY.

WHEN Roger Drexel took the foregoing letter to Madeline, and put it into her hands, he said:

"It is for Dr. Vaughan, and you will please take charge of it. It is written in a cipher, which is known to him, for it contains information that I would not ask you to keep in your possession in writing. It is of too dangerous a nature; as it is, you are safe enough. It maybe that I shall have to go away at any moment, and to be absent for some time; but, if so, while all goes well, I shall let you hear from me, by some means, at stated intervals. Should I be for more than a month invisible to the general world, I will try, by some means, to see *you* in the interval, or to communicate with you at length. If at any time you do *not* hear from me at the end of a given time, you may give this letter to Dr. Vaughan, and tell him everything. But you *will* hear from me, and I may even communicate with you often, if it seems needful, by letter, or messenger, or signal. And now let

me tell you what I may of my plans. Above all, we must *understand each other.*"

He was preparing for a grave and difficult undertaking, and he was plunging into his maze with a clue so slight, upon evidence and suggestions so complicated and contradictory, that he felt, and was, more than justified in his precautionary measures.

All his moments were to be occupied now, and to have followed him through his day would have taxed the physical, and puzzled and amazed the mental shadower.

"I shall not go away at once," he said to Madeline; "indeed, I have no plans as to my going. Fortune might favour me to that extent that I need not go at all. On the other hand, circumstances may compel me to go at any hour."

* * * * * * *

It was on the morning of the third day after the explosion in Mr. Lord's reception-hall that he put the letter into Miss Payne's hands. He had called at an early hour, and by appointment. A quarter of an hour later he entered the show-room of a fashionable florist, made his way to the rear through aisles of bloom and fragrance, and was welcomed by the sole occupant of a tiny office, which overlooked everything from an elevation three steps above the entrance floor, and through gauze-draped glass windows.

"Ah, Mr. Hurst; good-morning, sir," closing a ledger hastily, and drawing forward a chair.

The man was rapid and direct. While Drexel was seating himself, he asked, quickly:

"Anything new, sir?"

"On my part—no. How is it with you?"

"I'll tell you." The florist jerked his chair forward, and spoke in guarded tones. "It is not much, but I didn't feel just satisfied after you left the other day, in regard to our method of questioning the boys; they were all together, you know, and all that was required of them was a simple negative. I thought of a new plan, and put it at once into execution. I didn't call in one boy after another, but called them informally, interviewing each in such a manner that he need not know that he was not the only one so interviewed."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, it's this way: I call in a boy, and say something or other about his duties, or ask some question, and then follow it up with a mention of that basket of flowers. Ask him to try and remember everything that he did on that particular day, and note his manner."

"Well?"

"Well, I think I have found your boy."

"Really?"

"I *think* so. He reddened when I spoke of the business, and stammered, and could remember very little about that particular day."

"When did you question this boy?"

"Yesterday. Shortly before he left for the day."

"At what hour?"

"Not long after five o'clock."

"Do you dismiss your boys so early?"

"Some of them; the younger ones. I do not often send the small boys out with flowers after dark."

"I see." Drexel seemed to ponder.

"Would you like to see this boy?" asked the florist.

"Y—yes. That is, I would like to *look* at him, if you will call him and engage his attention for a few moments. He must not fancy that I am interested."

"I understand." The florist touched a silvered knob at the side of his desk. In a moment a head appeared at the office door.

"Send the boy Frank—Frank Price, to me." The head bobbed and vanished.

They waited a few moments in silence. The florist opening his ledger and taking up his pen, Drexel consulting his watch, and seeming pre-occupied.

"Really," said the florist, "those boys are very slow." They sat in silence for fully five minutes; then the head re-appeared.

"Frank Price is not here, sir."

"Not here?"

"No, sir. He has not been here this morning."

"Really! Has he sent any word?"

"No, sir. The boys were talking about him when I went to call him. They——" he looked first at his master, then at the stranger, and hesitated.

"Well? what is it?" asked the florist; "come in, Mike, and close that door. Now, never mind this gentleman—what were you about to say?"

Mike, a freckle-faced half-grown boy, came sidling in, and pulled the door shut behind him.

"Excuse me, sir," he began hastily, "but you was asking the boys who took the flowers to—to that place——"

"Yes, I know—go on, Mike."

"And nobody seemed to know."

"True."

"Well, sir, I heard them talkin' among themselves, and it seems that Billy Jarvis was almost sure that it was Frank that took the flowers; and afterward told him so. Frank wouldn't say anything right out, but kind of argued. It seems they were fussin' about it after they got out last night, and they've been talking it over again this morning."

The florist glanced toward Drexel, who sat with a copy of the *Morning Tribune* interposed between his face and the boy Mike.

"You may go, Mike," he said, after an exchange of glances.

When the door had closed behind Mike, Drexel put down his paper.

"Have you anything to suggest?" asked the florist.

"Yes. Will you question this boy? I will occupy myself with the newspaper. For the present, I do not wish to seem interested in the affair."

"Perhaps you will indicate a line——"

"Oh, you do well enough. Find out what is known about the

affair, and about this Frank—where he lives, etc. By the way, what do *you* know of him?"

"Not much. He has been with us some months—perhaps a year; is quick and prompt; always looks neat, but I think must be very poor. I don't know about his family, nor where he lives."

"Then let us have in Billy Jarvis," said Drexel, taking up his newspaper and pushing back his chair, so that it occupied the corner half hidden by the florist's desk.

Billy Jarvis was a tall, slim boy, with a wide-awake air and a "knowing" face. He presented himself without hesitation or awkwardness, cap in hand, and stood expectantly before his employer smiling and serene. Billy was good nature personified.

The florist was a man of direct methods. His first words sent the smile from Billy's face:

"Boy, do you know that I've half a mind to discharge you?"

"I—sir?" Billy's mouth opened and closed as if speech had forsaken him.

"How often have I told you, with the others, that, above all, I required you to be frank and honest always."

"But, sir—if you please——"

"But I *don't* please, when I asked you yesterday morning, for the *second* time, if you knew anything about the basket of roses and lilies, what did you tell me?"

"Nothing, sir." Billy had begun to pull himself together, but at the mention of the basket he flushed and paled again through his freckles.

"Nothing?"

"Or—I may have said that I didn't take the basket, and didn't know who did."

"Didn't *know*. Now, young man, don't waste any more words—out with it. Why did you accuse Frank Price, or hint that it was he who took that basket?"

The boy hung his head and was silent.

"Well, sir!"

"I—I don't like to tell on the other boys, sir."

"Oh, you don't like to be a tale-bearer. That's well; but circumstances alter cases. It will be to Frank's interest that we—that I know the truth. Did Frank deliver that basket of roses and lilies?"

"I—I am not sure, sir. I—really am not."

"Think. It was a centre-piece, a large one, made for a dinner table. Come, now." The tone of the florist had grown milder; it was almost coaxing. The boy seemed to renew his courage. He looked up, straightened his shoulders, and came a step nearer his employer.

"I'll tell you just how it was, sir. I was sent out with some bouquets, for the theatre, they said. I overtook Frank carrying a basket. I *think* it was the lilies and roses."

"You think?"

"I am *not* sure. Not quite."

"Not quite, but *almost*. Go on."

"I thought as I came up that he was talking with someone, but

there was such a crowd I could not be sure. Anyhow, by the time I came up with him he was alone, and we went on together for two blocks ; then I turned, and we went opposite ways almost."

"Do you remember the time?"

"No, sir; but it was late, for when I got back all the others were gone except Frank, and he came running in. He seemed in a great hurry, and provoked, too. I remember what he said."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'There, one is always late—just when one don't want to be.'"

"Did you go away together?"

"We started : that is, I tried to keep with him for a little way, but he hurried so. We used often to walk to Merrill Street together—I live on Merrill, and used to leave him there—but that night, before he had gone half a block, as I was puffing along to keep up with him, he said, '*You* needn't hurry because I do.' 'What makes you in such a hurry?' says I. 'I'm hungry,' he says, 'and I'm going to have an extra big supper. I've got to go on.' With that, he begins to run, and I didn't try to keep up with him any more. I noticed one thing, though."

"What was that?"

"He turned the very next corner, and I thought that was queer, for if he *was* so hurrying, that was not going home. I suppose he went somewhere else to supper."

"Probably," smiled the florist, who was growing interested in the investigation. "Do you know where Frank lives?"

"Yes, sir. At least, I know it's on Krupp Street, at a corner, in a big tenement."

"Now tell me, why didn't you speak out when I made my first inquiry?"

"Because I thought, of course, Frank would speak right up ; and when he didn't, I didn't want to be mean, sir, and he looked at me as much as to say, 'Don't tell.'"

"Oh, you boys, with your notions of honour! But you spoke of it afterwards?"

"Yes, sir, but only to Frank. I didn't mean to let the others know ; but one of the boys overheard us, and so this morning, when Frank didn't come, they began about it, and some thought he had sold the basket, or done something with it, and was afraid to come back this morning."

"Well, they were greatly mistaken, as boys are sometimes apt to be. The flowers were delivered, and no one wants to blame Frank."

The gentleman reading in the corner laid down his newspaper, and made a movement as if to rise.

"Mr. Hurst, I'm quite at your service," cried the florist. "Pardon me, I did not expect to be so long over this little matter. Billy, you may go ; and I think it would be well, as you seem a friend of his, to drop in and see if Frank may not be sick."

"My dear sir,' said Drexel, when the boy was gone, "you would make a superb examining magistrate, a most judicious one."

"With sundry hints from you," smiled the florist. "Well, what now? You wanted the interview to close, did you not?"

"Yes. And now may I trouble you still more. I want someone from your establishment to go to the home of this boy Frank Price. Not our friend Billy, who might gossip, perhaps."

"I think Mike would do; he is very faithful, and not too talkative. Besides, he does not know that I am making any special inquiry. What instructions shall I give him?"

"Merely to look up the boy and find out if he remained away to-day from necessity." The two men were standing now, and face to face. "There may, of course, be an accident, or some mishap. Above all, the boy and his friends must suppose that the inquiry comes from *you:* the connection with the delivery at Mr. Lord's house must not be suspected."

"I understand," said the florist, but he looked both mystified and interested.

"You have a right to have earned a better understanding," said Drexel, gravely. "I am sure enough of your discretion. I told you that the boy who left that basket at Mr. Lord's door also left a small package, and that it was my desire to trace the sender of that package. Do you know Mr. Lord?"

"Merely in a business way. He is a man of strong character. I admire his business methods."

"Well, the person who confided that package to your messenger boy does *not*, for the package contained dynamite, and it nearly succeeded in killing, not only Mr. Lord, but several of his friends.'

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the florist, dropping back into his chair. Whereupon Drexel resumed his own seat, and as briefly as possible told the story of the explosion and its results.

"Good heavens!" again exclaimed the good man. "Can such things be here in New York? Why, one might as well live in Russia."

"Unless one happened to have political opinions," amended his visitor.

"True, true. But this is not political, of course? A personal matter, more likely."

"Hardly. Mr. Lord had been warned. It was the new war-cry, 'Down with capital. Give the earth to the labourer.'"

"Which means oftener to those who will not work. But can it be this boy, this Frank, is the tool of socialist, anarchist?"

"That does not necessarily follow; he may have been somebody's dupe. But you understand now why we have kept this matter from the press, and why I ask you to do me this favour. I must go at once; I have lost too much time this morning. May I ask you to let me have the result of Mike's investigation in writing, unless it should seem to you best that I should see the boy myself. If his report is simple, and not of a doubtful nature, please write me at once, and send the letter by a trusty messenger to this address." He pencilled the street and number on one of the florist's cards. And the two men parted with mutual cordiality and good-will.

It was nearing noon when Drexel left the florist's, and at half-past two, he received the following note—

"My Dear Sir,—Mike has just returned. He found the mother of Frank Price on the top floor of the big tenement on the south-east corner of Krupp and Martin Streets. Mrs. Price is a sewing woman, with two small children—girls. She was almost distracted over the absence of Frank, who has not been home, she says, since yesterday morning, when he set out with his luncheon for his day's work. Upon renewing my inquiries among the boys, I find that some of them, taking advantage of the few words dropped by Billy Jarvis, began teasing Frank to tell them if it was really he who carried the much-talked-of basket, and that he, refusing to talk, and very red in the face, left them abruptly when they got upon the street last evening, and set off, not in the direction of K—— Street, but *down town.* None of them attempted to follow him, nor could they guess where he was going.

"I think it almost needless to add that I shall look into this matter, shall find the boy if possible. It was upon leaving my place of business that this boy disappeared—if he has disappeared. I have already notified the police, and will report result to you.

"Yours respectfully,

"R. M. Jones, Florist."

"A prompt man—a most upright man," commented Drexel, upon reading this letter. "But lest he should fail to find Master Frank Price, *I, too, will begin an investigation.*"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DETECTIVE CAMERA.

At three o'clock, half an hour after reading the florist's letter, Drexel presented himself before his friend the Chief of Police.

"Well," said that person affably. "What is it now?"

"Captain, will you lend me another man?"

"Another? We shall have to begin swearing in deputies if this continues."

"It might not be such a bad plan," retorted Drexel meaningly. "But this time I only want a day or two of work, and not very hard work. If you can give me a good-natured, elderly, fatherly sort of person, it would suit me admirably. I'll tell you what I want. A boy has been missing from his home since yesterday—or is said to be missing. His mother is a poor sewing woman. I have reason to think there's a crook somewhere. It may even turn out that the boy is in hiding, and that the woman knows it. I want a man shrewd enough to find out to a reasonable certainty if the boy is really missing or not."

"Umph. Whether that proves so easy or no depends upon the woman. Why don't you visit her yourself, man. You're as cute as any one *I* know?"

"First, because I have another part to play. And, second, because,

if my suspicions are anything like correct, the house is probably closely watched. A policeman may be expected to visit a house when a boy is missing; and nobody must know that it is not the police who are investigating. Pardon me, captain, but—every moment is of value."

The captain touched a bell, and gave an order.

"Bates is here," he said, "and he's the man you want. What else can I do for you?"

"Nothing—at present. If your Bates is the right man we will go at once. I have a carriage near the corner. Is there anything new—among the revolutionists?"

"Nothing special. Oh, those fellows are always *talking*—and they hold a good many meetings lately. We are keeping our eyes open."

"There's need of it," said Drexel, turning as the policeman entered. No moments were wasted in explanation.

"We can talk on the way," said Drexel. "It is a twenty minutes' drive, with good horses, to Krupp Street."

Mr. Bates filled the measure of his requirements perfectly. He was good-natured, elderly, fatherly in appearance; it did not take Drexel long to determine that he was also shrewd.

When they were within a block of Krupp Street, Bates left the carriage, and Drexel instructed his trusty driver to move slowly past the corner, and stop within sight of the door where he saw the officer enter, but on the opposite side of the street. "When he comes out," finished Drexel, "you are to drive on and take him up at the next street, just around the corner."

Before they arrived at Krupp Street, Drexel had taken the precaution to draw the curtains of the close carriage, and now snugly concealed from view, he surveyed, through the tiny window in the rear, that portion of the street nearest the entrance to the huge tenement which harboured the widow Price and her little family.

There were no loungers about the doorway, nor on the street. This was a quiet neighbourhood, and Drexel soon decided that there were no spies to elude, unless, indeed, they were unusually adroit in their methods.

He waited fully twenty minutes with no sign of impatience, seeming indeed to have plenty of mental occupation; and at the end of that time the slow, forward movement of the carriage told him that Officer Bates was about to rejoin him.

"You have a good driver," were the first words of that worthy man, when he was again seated beside Drexel. "He knows his business."

"Yes. He has been very well trained," replied the other carelessly. "He's not an ordinary driver by any means. Well—how did you succeed?"

"Very well, I think. To begin with: the boy is certainly *lost*, so far as his mother is concerned. The woman is honest—not a doubt of it, and in deep trouble. There's pinching poverty there. She's about distracted about that boy."

"Yes? I am not surprised at that. She must be looked after. What did you learn about the boy's associates?"

"Very little. She could hardly remember the names of the boys who work at the 'Flower Store,' as she calls it. She says that Frank

has always had to work too hard to make many acquaintances ; that she knows of no one who could have any reason for enticing him away from home. She is sure he never kept the company of bad boys ; and he was always at home evenings. She had taught him to avoid boys who were idle and loungers, and he was always very obedient. In short, there's no hint nor help to be got *there*. She has no friends nor relatives in the city, and few acquaintances. She is sure something has happened to Frank ; she insists that he has been run over in the street, or been hurt or killed, in some accidental way."

"Poor soul! And did you sound her about the flowers?"

"Yes, thoroughly. I am sure she has never heard those flowers mentioned. If her boy did that errand, he has never spoken of it to her. She gave me this." He put a small picture into Drexel's hand. It was a cheap tin type, showing a bright-faced boy in an awkward attitude, and evidently dressed in his "Sunday best." "She says it's a good likeness, and was taken about four months ago. I had to pledge myself to return it."

Drexel studied it thoughtfully.

"It's not a bad face," he said, "not a tricky face. This will help us. Now let's consider our next step. I'm going to take you a little further into this business."

"The captain puts me at your orders," said the officer, quietly.

"I'm inclined to agree with the mother. This boy is not a runaway. He could hardly have wandered out of his way and got lost. He has good legs, no doubt, and a tongue in his head. If what his mother says of him is true, he has not been enticed away. If he has met with an accident——"

"He can be found," said Bates.

"Precisely ; and I want *you* to find him."

"I'm willing to try. In fact, I promised the woman to do my best for her."

"Quite right. Suppose the boy has been killed upon the street. You know where to look for him?"

"At the Morgue—yes."

"We'll begin there, because it's the shortest and the surest way. You have yet some daylight left, and these horses are fresh. I am going to put them and my driver at your disposal. You will take this picture and go to the Morgue. I hope you will not succeed *there*."

"So do I."

"Next—try the police stations."

"A good idea."

"You can do all these to-night?"

"Yes, and more."

"If nothing is learned at the stations, we must try the hospitals. Be sure that you visit them *all*—if necessary."

"That is a good thought, too," said the officer.

"Of course, the moment you make a discovery you will report to me," went on Drexel. "But, unless you *do* make a discovery, you need not report until you have been the rounds. When you have done with the carriage to-night, you can tell the driver where to take you up in the morning. He will be prompt, you may depend. It will, perhaps,

take you all day to do the hospitals. After that come to me at this address. If I am out, some one will be there with information for you." He put a card into the officer's hand.

"What shall I say at the hospitals or stations, supposing I find the boy?" asked the latter.

"As little as possible; you are doing your duty in looking up a missing boy. Naturally, you will be supposed to be acting on behalf of the mother. Find out how he came there, and if you cannot bring him away with you, see that he is detained until you can report to me. I shall try and spend the most of my time at the address you have there until I have heard from you. I shall leave you at the next street."

The room which he had chosen and the address of which he had given to Bates, was one of several which he had taken, each in a different quarter, and at a considerable distance each from the other. In the game he was beginning he must contend, he knew, with a wily enemy. He was in constant danger of being shadowed as well as being a shadow, and he meant to give his opponents a long chase should they fall upon his tracks. Then, too, he must employ several agents, and it was not his purpose that these should meet or know each other, unless such knowledge was necessary to his success.

From force of habit, he glanced quickly about him when he sprang from the carriage. It was hardly probable that he had been followed on this occasion; but some one might be following Bates from Krupp Street. And if so, the sight of himself might cause the spy to change his course.

"It's hardly likely," he muttered to himself; "still—strange things have happened to me." He walked carelessly along until he came to the entrance to one of those large cafés which extend from street to street, having doors of entrance upon two sides. He went in here and walked rapidly through, glancing about him as if in search of some one, entering at a right angle the long apartment, which had its exit upon the other street; before this exit, as he knew, a number of cabs were always in waiting. He made a sign to the driver of the nearest, while yet under the shelter of the pillared and covered doorway, darted out quickly on the side and between the pillars furthest from the corner where the two streets intersected, and was in the cab and away.

The immense building in which his room was situated was, like that of the restaurant, upon a corner, and with two big entrances through which people were constantly coming and going. The place contained—as indicated by the big bulletin boards—doctors' and lawyers' offices, dental "parlours," real estate brokers, agents of many kinds, studios, a photographer, a "book concern," an employment "bureau," and "furnished rooms."

Before the door of an inner room upon the second floor, a modest door with no ground-glass upper half, with closed-up transom, and bearing a small tin card, upon which one could read, by approaching quite near it, the words "*Book Agency*," printed in small green capitals upon a dingy black ground; Drexel paused, glanced about him, and then quickly entered; as quickly closing and locking the door behind him.

A man, so small that at first glance he might have passed for less than a half-grown boy, dropped his short legs from the desk in front of him, whirled about in a revolving chair, much too big and too high for him, and emerged from a cloud of tobacco smoke, to come hastily forward.

"Ah, ha!" he said, in a high pitched but not unpleasant voice. "You see, I am in possession."

"Quite right," said Drexel, shaking the little man's hand with a heartiness that left its impression and caused a grimace, "I take that as a sign that all goes well."

"You're the best judge of that," said the little man, getting back into the big chair. "Have a cigar?"

"Yes; and glad of the chance to smoke and listen."

If an able artist had been asked to portray unoffending amiability, good-natured insipid mediocrity, he would have selected from among a hundred models Mr. Asa Norton, "Little Norton," as he was more familiarly and generally known. Short and slight, pale face, light eyes, and scant sandy hair, countenance of no particular type, with no prominent feature, and void of anything like expression. Little Norton in repose and, when he chose, in action, was inconspicuous, not the sort of man one takes the trouble to look at twice.

No one knew this better than Little Norton himself, and he counted it one of his most valued and useful "points."

"Oh, I'm cut out for my business," he was in the habit of saying. "No one knows better than I, the advantage of being small and nothing to look at."

"There is not so much to *tell*," began Little Norton, while Drexel lighted his cigar. "I'm established under the same roof with your foreign princesses, and even have a room on the same floor. If I were making a written report, I could give it considerable length by telling how often I have gone in and out, passed their door, managed to meet their servants going to and fro. I don't suppose you expected much in the way of discovery just yet?"

"No; I can't say I did. If you are established, and have your game well in hand, that's worth something. Have there been any visitors?"

"Yes, one. A young man, good-looking, and a foreigner, I think; he came this afternoon early, and stayed just an hour and ten minutes. He was slight and dark, with fine eyes, and an easy springing gait that anyone would notice at once. From his manner, I should say it was *not* his first visit. I would have given something to have caught his face, but he took me unawares, at first, and when he left, I could not get in front of him even for a moment."

Drexel smiled. "I recognize the description," he said, "and would rather have the young man's name than his face."

"Well, I can give you *that*," said Little Norton, composedly.

"Good!"

"Yes. I followed him, and didn't have to go far. He is stopping at the *Lancaster*. I didn't have much trouble in getting at his name: it's Rene Savorin."

"Savorin! Rene Savorin!" repeated Drexel, thoughtfully. "It seems to me I have heard that name. Rene Savorin."

"When I got back," went on Little Norton, "I met with better luck, though perhaps it won't amount to anything. As I was passing the *ladies' entrance*, a hall servant was talking to a little man, uglier than I am, and not much bigger. He was asking for the Princess Sacha Orloff."

"Ah!"

"He had a message which he was ordered to deliver at the lady's own door, and there was a brief argument about it, loud enough for me to hear, after I had turned an angle of the hall. It ended in the fellow's being escorted to the Princess's door by the servant."

"Yes—go on."

"When I heard what was to be done I hurried on, stopped boldly a few paces from the door of the lady's ante-room, and, with my back turned toward it, waited. When I heard them close behind, I turned, began to speak, stopped myself, and said, as if annoyed at my mistake, 'Oh! it's *you*. I mistook you for some one I am waiting for.' I had, of course, tipped all the hall servants, with an eye to possibilities of this sort, and my servant was satisfied. The messenger did not enter the rooms of Madam the Princess, but gave his letter to a maid-servant and waited outside. I changed my position, took a step or two nearer, pulled a little string, and—click, he was taken—full length." He took from a breast pocket a small object wrapped in tissue paper, talking the while. "It was my new little button camera did the business, and the print's a good one, though none too big." He had unrolled the tissue paper, and now held out a circle of sensitive paper little more than an inch and a half in size. "I had to take him sidewise," he added, as Drexel took the paper. "But it's *him*—why—what?"

Drexel had looked at the small unfinished proof, looked closer, and then uttered a sharp exclamation. Little Norton's eyes followed him curiously as he got up and went to the window to take a closer view.

"Ah!" he said, turning suddenly. "You have done well, Norton. It's a good day's work. *I know him.*"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SEEKING A CLUE.

"EH! you know him?"

"Well, we're not acquaintances. I have seen him. The fellow's a spy, and—I begin to think, one who may prove troublesome. Ah! I remember."

He stopped short, and began to walk about the room. He had suddenly remembered that on each of the three occasions when this spy had crossed his path, this stranger, Savorin, had also appeared.

"Listen, Norton," he said, coming back and sitting down opposite the little man once more. "The first time I saw this fellow I discovered him prowling about a house where I had been making a call.

I thought at the time that he was following a young lady, and I in turn followed *him*."

"I see."

"We shadowed the lady to her home, and just as our spy was, or seemed to be, about to leave his quarry, a carriage drove up to the door. Three men got out. One I knew; the others I had seen once before. And *one* of these two was—Mr. Rene Savorin."

"Ah—ha!"

"Wait. The spy and one of these men exchanged signals."

"Ah, Savorin—of course?"

"No—there's the rub. Savorin never glanced toward him. I doubt if he saw him. It was the other, a stout Englishman."

"Oh—that mixes things."

"Perhaps. The second time I saw our spy, I was leaving your hotel after paying my respects to Madam La Princess."

"Oh—*oh!*"

"Near the entrance I met this Savorin."

"Met?"

"Yes. He was entering the house, I making my exit."

"He was going to call upon the Russian?"

"Possibly—let me get on. Outside, upon the opposite side of the street, I saw our spy again."

"Yes—yes, yes! And to-day Savorin calls first, and then the spy—yes, yes."

"Yes—yes," repeated Drexel. "Now, Norton, on two occasions there has been on the one hand—Savorin and myself, on the other the spy. Was the fellow watching Savorin—or me."

"Jove!" ejaculated Little Norton; then, "But *this* time, to-day, it *couldn't* have been you!"

"No, but it may have been *you*."

"Great Scott!"

"Norton, these men that we're fighting are not children; they're veterans, long-armed and cunning. If you allow yourself to forget this, if you are off your guard for a moment, you'll be detected, and then good-bye to your usefulness on this case. It would not be matter for surprise if, while you were operating with your precious little button camera, the fellow was doing the same good turn for *you*."

"No, he wasn't," cried Norton. "From the moment when he handed his letter to the servant, he stood with both hands clasped on that crooked stick, just as you see him in that picture."

"Well, Norton, if the man appears again, you must manage to find out his lair. Don't lose sight of him until you do."

"Hush," said Norton. "There's somebody outside."

At the same moment a quick knock was heard. Drexel opened the door promptly, a little to Norton's surprise.

It was Officer Bates who entered.

"Already!" said Drexel.

"You? Bates," said Norton.

"I've found him," said Bates.

Drexel closed the door quickly. "Sit down, Bates," he said briskly, "*you* need not go, Norton" For that little man had already

slid out of his chair. "Wait until we hear Mr. Bates's report. I may need you both." Little Norton got back into his seat, where he sat during Bates's recital, looking about as animated and as much interested as an automaton. "Now then," said Drexel nodding to Bates.

"Well, I struck luck from the word go," began Bates, smiling broadly. "Of course, when you left me I went to the Morgue, nothing there. Then I drove to the nearest station, which happened to be that on K—— Street, and I began my inquiries there in due form. Before I had got far the captain broke in."

"'Missing since when did you say?' I told him. 'Wait,' he said, 'till I see if O'Brien is here.' O'Brien was on hand and he called him in. 'O'Brien,' says he, 'wasn't it you that picked up the boy on Court and Laffin corners last night?' O'Brien said yes, and then told how it happened. There was the usual crowd at the corners and three or four of them busy keeping everybody out of danger, or trying to. The boy was crossing the street, and must have got hit by something, waggon tongue, or wheel, or end board. His head was all bloody, and he had got a broken leg before O'Brien could get him out from under the horses' feet. There was a drug store close by, and they took him there and washed the blood off his face, and O'Brien had a good look at him. I showed him the picture and he says it's the same boy."

"I'd like to see O'Brien," said Drexel.

"I'll call him," said Bates, getting up with a grin.

"Where is he?"

"I brought him with me. Thought you might want to see him. He's outside—in the carriage."

"What? Not in front of this place!"

"Oh no, not *quite*, the carriage is on the opposite side of the street, a little lower down than this, but not so far but that O'Brien can see the entrance. You see, I know this place."

"Umph, I dare say."

"And I told him to look out for me. If I showed myself at the door he was to get out, walk past on the opposite side, cross the street, and come in at the north entrance, I would meet him on the landing and bring him here. I knew it wouldn't do to have *two* policemen come in together from the street."

"Oh!" laughed Drexel, "you're a great artist, Bates. Go, if you please, and fetch O'Brien."

O'Brien was the model Hibernian policeman. He told his story without interruption from Drexel, very much as Bates had told it, and with little more by way of detail. "It's the boy ye're wantin', sor," he said confidently. "Sure, sor, we tuk him to the All Saints' Hospital; at once his bones were sot."

"Didn't he give his name?"

"Sorra a name sure, he cudn't speak at all. It wor the hurt to his head, the docthers said."

Drexel's face darkened. "Did you see the boy before he fell?" he asked.

"Not I, sor, I was workin' my way best, right amongst the horses

when I seed somethin' strugglin' like on the ground. I wint my quickest, and two or three min helped me to get the boy out."

"Was the boy alone when the accident happened?"

"If he wasn't alone sure he had quare kind o' company. Nobody new him or claimed him."

After a few more questions Drexel dismissed O'Brien, and afterwards Bates, bidding the latter report to him on the following morning, for a possible commission. When both were gone he turned to Little Norton.

"This is the boy who delivered the flowers at Mr. Lord's door on the evening of the explosion," he said. "I undertook to investigate at the florist's, and the boy did not seem anxious to admit that he was the bearer," here Drexel briefly recounted the story of his experience in pursuit of Frank Price.

Norton listened with his usual stolidity.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "you want to use me in this business."

"Quite right."

"What is it?"

"I want you to forego your dinner at the Oriental, and go at once to your old rooms; go cautiously, mind, and make yourself over. You are too well dressed. A new face, too, will be safest. Then go to the florist's place of business, if you don't find him there, you may not at this hour, go to his residence, I have the address. He understands me and knows what I want. Tell him of this discovery and ask him to go at once to Krupp Street, get Mrs. Price and take her straight to the hospital; she must identify the boy. I want you to go with them and keep your eyes open. At the hospital, find out the truth about the boy's condition, above all, how soon one may talk with him. Ask Mr. Medlicott to assume *for me* all responsibility as to the boy's care; he must have the best, and his mother must not be permitted to take him from the hospital—not yet."

Little Norton was looking at him intently.

"Well, what is it?" queried Drexel.

"You have an idea—about this boy," he said slowly, "I would like to ask what it is?"

"Listen, then. Two of Mr. Lord's servants declare that they saw this boy, but they describe him differently. A woman who saw him pass the basement window saw, so she says, a small boy dressed in dark clothes and wearing a cap. Instead of going to the side entrance this boy passes on, and two minutes later the street door opens to admit a boy who wears, according to the footman, a *light jacket* and a *hat*. He delivers the flowers that were seen by the woman. She is positive on that point, and he deposits them, with his own hands, upon the table, as I have before told you."

"I'll wager," said Little Norton, "that you have a theory. What is it?"

"Well, Norton, if you're not direct, you're nothing. But I don't mind telling you. It's hardly probable that a boy, upon the public street and at the very door of an aristocrat's house, should stop to change his clothes. It *is* possible that there were *two* boys and that for some reason the

flowers changed hands ; in that case they were not delivered by Frank Price, for *he* wore dark clothes *and a cap*."

"Oh—ah!"

"Now these facts, taken together with the boy's evasions when questioned, may mean that he was beguiled into trusting the basket to another, who, in this case was, of course, somebody's agent. The Prices are very poor, and a bribe may have been offered him."

"True." Norton mused a moment, then he asked while casting at Drexel a keen, quickly withdrawn glance. "Do you go any further?"

"Eh?"

"Oh, you understand me! everything seems in train. That this boy should be hurt just at this time, is, to say the least, a coincidence."

"I have thought of that, but we must hear what the surgeons say. I am going to take that into my own hands, which need not prevent you from keeping your eyes open, of course."

"Now that I understand matters," said Little Norton, "I'm off. In the meantime, how about business at the Oriental?"

"That must wait for the present, we have an inkling already and I think may be able to trace our spy through Savorin. If things grow complicated I shall put some one else in your place at the hotel, and give you livelier work."

"That suits me," said the little man, "and now for the florist's."

When he was at last alone, Drexel penned the following note to Madeline Payne :—

"MY FRIEND,—Under present circumstances it seems best that I should not call at your house, but I *much* wish to see *you*. I shall ride in the park to-morrow morning from half-past ten to twelve o'clock. If you should be there also at that time, it would make me your most happy and gratified servant,

"R. DREXEL."

"There!" he said, "if that falls into wrong hands it will be taken for a very trite love-letter. *She* will be quick enough to understand.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW PURSUIT.

THE crowd at Court and Laffin Streets was less dense in the evening ; rather, the number of vehicles was somewhat lessened, while the foot passengers surged on in shoals ; these corners were the points from which several theatres, cafés, and other resorts, quite as popular, if less proper, were reached with ease, and street cars and omnibuses discharged here their evening freight of pleasure-seekers. As a consequence, street stands were numerous in this locality, and newsboys and bootblacks conspicuous.

Early in the evening while the crowds were hastening toward their evening's pleasure and the traffic of cars and omnibuses was at its height, a dignified personage might have been seen about these four corners moving with the throng, now here, now there ; seeming quite at ease, and in no haste to "move on."

He was tall and rather stout, with blonde hair and whiskers, wearing a tall silk hat and gold rimmed spectacles, and carrying a heavy cane in his gloved hands.

After some time spent in seemingly aimless loitering, this man paused and stood upon the north-east corner of the intersecting streets.

For some moments he watched the manœuvres of a talkative little bootblack, who had stationed himself at the foot of a flight of steps leading up to a lofty entrance in the angle of the great corner building.

This lad had been very busy for more than an hour, polishing the boots of the pleasure-goers. He seemed to know many of his patrons, and to be a popular artist in his line. While at work upon one pair of feet he had, for the most part, two or three customers in waiting.

"There!" said the lad, as he gave a final touch to the last of a group; "that there's a daisy job fer a quick 'un. An' if ye hurry ye won't be late neither. Golly, how they thins out jest afore the curtain goes up."

For the first moment in many he looked about him and saw no pair of feet waiting the application of his brushes. "Business paterin' out for to-night," he muttered, and then he noticed the tall man with the spectacles, who had gradually drawn nearer as the last patron moved briskly away. "Want yer boots blacked, sir?"

"Yes, my boy," said the stranger, in a genial tone; "I have been waiting for my turn for some time."

"Ye orter crowd right up," said the boy, preparing to begin at once the polishing process. "First come first served, ye know. I seen ye waitin' there, but thort ye wus jest lookin' at the crowd."

"So I was, so I was, my boy. And I was in no haste. A crowd always interests me, especially a strange one like this."

"I *thort* ye must be a stranger. I know I ain't navver seen ye afore."

"Yes; I'm a stranger. Old as I am, I expect you could tell me much that would be new to me about this big city."

"You jest bet I could. About *my* part of it, anyway. A feller sees a lot a fakin' round like, we fellers do."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the stranger, musingly. "Do you always, operate on this corner?"

"Well—I've been here a good while, lem'me see," stopping his brush a moment to calculate. "Yes, I've been at this stand for seven months now, and I've got about all the trade comes this way. I've got my regular customers day an' evenin's. 'Twouldn't be wuth while for any other feller to try and cut in here. Why, I was offered ten dollars for my stand and privileges here jest day afore yesterday."

"Ah, indeed."

"Yes, sir, I've thought sence that the bloke wa'n't jest on the square, but it don't make no differ. I told him I didn't want to sell. Not *much*. This 'ere's my old stompin' grown. I know it, and it knows *me*. Now, t'other foot, sir."

The stranger presented his "t'other foot," and looked up and down the street meditatively.

"These are busy corners I should judge from what I saw to-night," he said, carelessly.

"*Busy!* Lor, you jest ort to come along here in the daytime. I tell ye, it keeps the perlice hoppin'."

"Is it worse then than at night?"

"You bet it's worse. There's so much more tramin' an' drays an' waggons an' things."

"Ah, indeed. Do you ever have an accident in these crowds?"

"Accidents! my, yes. There's smash ups about every day; folks gets knocked down tryin' to dodge acrost, an' last week, a man jest rushed out there an' flung hisself down, right in front of the cable cars, tryin' to get run over. The perlice yanked him off the track in time, though."

"My, my! It must be an unsafe place for children, for boys out alone. Boys are apt to be careless sometimes."

"That's so. Why, only yesterday a boy got knocked down out there, right under the feet of some big horses, and he was jest about tramped to death. I seen the hull thing."

"Really now! That must have frightened you."

"Not *me!* I'm uste to it. It scairt the other boy, though. My, but, *how* he lit out."

"Were there two boys?"

"Yes; two of 'em started acrost together."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, 'tain't much. I didn't happen to be busy, an' I noticed the two boys come up an' stand on the pavement right over there behind you. Don't s'pose I'd a-noticed 'em, if it hadn't been for a old sardim of a Jew a-standin' close to 'em. I hate a Jew. An old Jew did me a mean turn once, an' the hull lot of 'em's mean anyhow. This one looked meaner than most."

"Why—how did he look?"

"I guess you ain't seen many of 'em," said the boy, looking up and ceasing from his labours. "He was a little dried-up codger with an old butternut coat on, an' he had a big knotty walking-stick in his hand. I noticed him looking at the two boys, an' I seen him give the little feller a real mean ugly look, s'pose the boy had jostled him, or somethin'."

"Did he speak to the boys?"

"No, not that *I* seen. He wus jest a-scowlin' at the little un when I happened to see, an' that made me take more notice of them boys than I would generally. I thought the little chap seemed kind a scairt like; he kep' hurrying the other one along."

"Was it the little one that was hurt?"

"No, it was the big one. An' *he* wa'n't very big."

"As big as you, perhaps?"

"Well, mebbe a little bigger. As I was sayin', they all started to cross about together, an' they went into the crowd Ingin file."

"Did you see which went first?"

"Yes, 'twas the little feller; an' the Jew with his big stick come last. They was all mixed up among the waggons an' horses for a minit, an' then I seen the boy go down under the horses' feet. An' then the cops rushed in, an' jest then the little feller streaked it past me an' off the same way he come. *My*, but his face was white, and he jest *legged* it."

"What became of the Jew?"

"Oh, I didn't see no more of *him*. He got across safe enough, you bet, and went right along. 'Twa'n't nothin' to *him* how many boys got killed right under his nose. He didn't stop to look after the boy, or I'd a seen him."

"And the boy that was hurt; what became of him?"

"Took him to the hospital."

"It seems to me," said the stranger, slowly, "that I read about that boy in the newspapers. But, look here, my lad, that paper said that the injured boy was *alone;* that nobody could identify him."

The boy recoiled a step, and a look of anger flashed into his face. "Look here," he said, "what're ye givin' me, anyhow?"

"Softly, boy, softly. I only thought it was strange that nobody knew the boy. Didn't you tell what you saw?"

"Well, I jest didn't. What for would I? 'Twan't *my* business. D'ye s'pose I wanted ter be jerked off ter the police station fer a witness, an' like as not shet up over night, an' leave my stand an' lose my trade. Not *much*, I've got ter take care of Number One, *I* have. Who'd pay me or thank me? No, *sir*. What's the perlice fer, I sh'd like ter know. I ain't a-doin' their work. Darn it, anyhow, I wish I'd a-kep' my blamed mouth shet."

"You need not be uneasy about me, boy. I'm your friend, and I shall not abuse your confidence. But," he added, musingly, "I feel interested. I'd—give—five dollars—to see that boy—who ran away."

"Would ye?" cried the bootblack. "Wal, I wish I could jest run acrost him then, that's all."

"Would you know him again?"

"Know him! In *course* I'd know *him*."

"And would you know the other—the one who was hurt?"

"I ain't so sure about him. I was looking more at the little feller and the Jew."

"And would you know the *Jew?*"

"You *bet*."

"Even if he had changed his butternut coat for another?"

"I'd know *him* with his ugly mug, anyhow."

The stranger seemed to meditate. He was jingling some loose coin in his hand. He had not as yet paid the bootblack.

"What is your name, my lad?" he asked presently.

"Johnny Deegan."

"Have you a family?"

"No, I'm all the family there is."

"And where do you live?"

"Oh—most anywhere. Sometimes with some of the other boys, sometimes at the home. I ain't very particular about lodgin's."

"And how much do you earn a day, Johnny? How much at the most?"

"Well, sense I've been at this stand, I've done purty well; most days have saved a dime or two." The boy was putting away his brushes. It was evident that he did not mean to be communicative about his earnings. The stranger smiled.

"Listen, Johnny," he said. "It's time for me to go, and I see you want to be off. Now I'm going to make you an offer."

Johnny slung his box across his shoulder, and stood waiting. "I'm interested in your story about those boys. Do you suppose if you gave all your time to it you could find the boy that ran away? Wait, let me finish. Of course, you would have to look for him on the streets, in the places where such boys are most likely to be. You ought to know where to look for such a boy." Johnny grinned. "Was this boy well dressed?"

"Umph, 'bout as well as me." Johnny certainly could not be accused of being well dressed. "T'other one, the one that got hurt, was dressed better."

"Yes, and if you were looking for the boy, of course you could keep your eyes open for the Jew. You are sure he was a Jew?"

"He looked like one. I would go amongst the Jews to hunt him."

"Well, my boy, suppose I offer to get you a room where you could go to sleep, and pay for your meals, and get you a better suit of clothes. How much a day will you take to leave your corner here, and make it your business to look for those two?"

"My eye!" exclaimed Johnny, with a knowing wink. "So *that's* yer little game, is it?"

"I'll arrange everything," went on the stranger, calmly. "You'll get your money regularly, every night, if you like. And the day that you find either one of them, and can show me where they live, I will give you twenty-five dollars, and be your friend afterward. If you don't want to black boots any more, I'll see that you have work and good pay. By the way, Johnny, are you hungry?"

"Wal, there ain't many times when I couldn't eat mor'n I git," admitted the boy.

"Well, don't you know a snug little place where we can go and get anything you want to eat, and talk this matter over? I'll pay, of course. And here, take this."

At sight of the piece of money that was slipped into his hand, hesitation vanished. Johnny pocketed the coin, and said,

"I know a bully place about two blocks from here."

"Come then."

* * * * * *

At eleven o'clock that night, Roger Drexel might have been seen in the room where he had lately received Officer Bates and Little Norton. The little man was present now, and talking with unusual animation. Roger was standing beside a small table, upon which lay a tall silk hat and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and was listening with evident interest, taking off meanwhile a blonde wig and a fine set of yellow whiskers.

* * * * * *

The next morning, and for many mornings after, the freckled face and pug nose of Johnny Deegan were missing from the north-east corner of Court and Laffin Streets.

CHAPTER XL.

MADELINE PAYNE THE DETECTIVE.

PROMPTLY at the hour named in his note to Madeline, Roger Drexel entered Central Park at the Scholar's Gate, knowing that she would be likely to arrive at this entrance, coming as she must from below. For the house of Mr. Lord was upon Fifth Avenue, and not too far from the park.

He was splendidly mounted, and looked as handsome and carefree as any idler of the morning. He lingered a little near the entrance, then turned into one of the bridle paths, taking care to choose a course that would bring him back soon to Fifty-ninth Street and the Scholar's Gate.

He had not long to wait. Madeline, too, was prompt, and as he rode to meet her, and wheeled his horse beside her own after an exchange of morning greetings, no one could have guessed, seeing them canter blithely away, that theirs was not a rendezvous of pleasure.

The brightness of the morning had lighted up her eyes and brought a glow into her cheeks. She looked, in spite of the fatigue of the days, as if she had never known weariness or care. The well-trained groom, who rode not far behind her, smiled and slackened his pace when he saw Drexel join his mistress. And so the two rode on side by side in silence until they were in one of the more retired bridle paths, and then he said :

"I hope you did not find it too difficult to come out."

"I did not find it difficult in the least," she replied. "Mr. Lord insists that things must go on, or seem to, as usual. And before your note came he had ordered me to take an airing to-day."

"Good ! and how is he ? "

"He suffers much, but the doctor says all is going well. It is hard to keep him as quiet as he should be."

"And Mrs. Ralston ? "

"Mrs. Girard took her away yesterday ; she is doing very well." She turned in the saddle to look him straight in the face. "Something has happened," she said.

"To you ? "

"Well, yes ; but I meant to you."

"Tell me your news first, please."

"I will. Last night we held a council of war ; first, Dr. Vaughan and I alone, then with Mr. Lord. Of course, you don't want the details, for there was an argument as long as the doctor would permit. We have carried our point, or *your* point ; it was your—suggestion. Mr. Lord has consented to shut up his house and go to the country as soon as it is prudent to remove him."

Drexel's face showed his surprise and gratification.

"Ah," he said, "I did not dare to hope he would be so easily persuaded."

"Oh! he has had time to think. But it is not altogether that. The old spirit is alive in him. He thinks it the best way to baffle his enemies."

"So it is, and it simplifies things for his friends. I wish he could go to-morrow."

"You do not think his house is safe for him?"

"It is not safe for any of us. That is—it's continually under surveillance; that's why I asked you to come here. My success depends upon my not being identified with Mr. Lord and his interests. At every step I am more and more convinced that we have to deal with adroit rascals, men who have skilful tools at their command."

"Ah!" sighed Madeline. "It looks like an uneven contest. How can we ever hope to protect Mr. Lord from future molestation, if he has really been condemned by one of these societies numbering so many men? We may baffle one or two, or perhaps more, but there are always others; we are as one to a thousand."

"Ah, but—it is not so unequal as you suppose. Did you think we were to waste our time upon the rank and file? That would be a useless task. It is the head of the snake that is dangerous. Take away the head or heads which control these mutineers, and I would snap my fingers at them all. The men who plan, command, and control these societies are never numerous. The upper circles, as they are called, are limited as to numbers. Somewhere, probably in this city, are three or four men, perhaps not so many, whom we must seek; remove these, and the danger is over. The army does not move without a commander. Vaughan thinks, and so, perhaps, does Lord, that some of his own disaffected employés are responsible for his injury."

"And such is not your opinion?"

"Such is not my opinion. This is my belief, and it is not without grounds. Elias Lord was one of the originators of this capitalistic amalgamation; he was most outspoken in his opinions and his opposition to the demands of the brotherhoods of strikers. He has made himself a marked man, and the leaders, who plan in secret, and are not even known to the rank and file, who issue their orders through emissaries, from whose judgment there is no appeal, *these* men have decided to make an example of Mr. Lord. These are the men we must seek and find. How we can best disarm them, we can decide when we know who they are."

"Oh," said Madeline. "Tell me, have we—have you made even the faintest beginning? is there any clue? I fancied——"

"Well?"

"I fancied that you knew where to begin this battle."

"Thanks to you, Miss Payne, I believe that I do."

"Thanks to me?"

"Yes, to you. Listen, or, first, tell me something more about your voyage across the Atlantic in company with Mr. La Croix and his party. How many did that party number?"

"There was no party. Only Mr. La Croix and his daughter."

"You forget the Englishman."

"No. The Englishman was presented to Mr. and Miss La Croix as he was to Mrs. Ralston and myself, by the captain."

"Really." He smiled oddly as he turned his face upon her. "Let us take this bridle path. it seems quite deserted. And what a discreet fellow your groom is. So he was introduced by the captain, after which, I suppose, he and Mr. La Croix became quite friendly."

"True," assented Madeline.

"And what other acquaintances did you make, you and the La Croix? I have a reason for asking, believe me."

"I do not doubt," she said, gravely, "and I begin to comprehend, too. There was a young man, an artist he called himself; he came on board alone, and soon became friendly with the Englishman."

"One moment. Was he a handsome, slender, dark-eyed youth?"

"Yes!" wonderingly.

"And was he called Savorin—Rene Savorin?"

"True."

"Now, do you not consider it odd that these three strangers should grow into friendly relations so rapidly, that soon after their arrival, they are all together at a meeting of anarchists. Mr. La Croix, the speaker of the evening, introduced by this Crashaw as one he has long known; and this handsome artist, Savorin, seated in the audience, acting as escort to Miss Moina La Croix. Do you not begin to understand me? do you think now that the spy who followed Miss La Croix from your house was merely the tool of a jealous man?"

She turned in the saddle, and for a moment they regarded each other silently.

"I see—many things," she said, at last. "And while I cannot yet abandon my faith in Moina La Croix, I understand fully that you were right, and I wrong. She must be proven guilty—or vindicated. I still believe in *her;* but I will do as you wish. I will see her to-morrow, or to-day, if you desire it, and I will adopt any line of conduct you may advise."

"Good, that's a long step ahead. But I am going to ask more than that of you."

"Ask, then."

"You must, of course, leave Mr. Lord's house soon?"

"Yes."

"Will you procure a companion, and take up your residence for a time at the 'Oriental'?"

"Will you tell me for what?"

"Ah, I am taking you at your word. I want a detective there—some one who can report to me the doings of one Princess Sacha Orloff, a fair Russian; who can, perhaps, make her acquaintance."

"What! and who is this Princess Orloff?"

"She is a genuine Princess, and a very beautiful woman; I believe her to be a spy."

"Of the Russian Government?"

"That I cannot say. She may, on the other hand, be a nihilist."

"In that case——"

"In that case, she is the agent of the master-spirits on the other side of the water; and is, perhaps, charged with watching those who

are ordering things here. Should this be so, you can see that she might become useful to us. I will be frank and tell you here, that I have reasons for thinking as I do, reasons which I am not at liberty to make known to you. I am a detective, remember. *One* reason, however, I can give you. Both my spy and your acquaintance, Savorin, have visited the fair Russian."

"I care nothing for your fair Russian," said Madeline, "but I would like to believe that Moina La Croix is—what she seems."

"So would I," said Drexel, glancing about him. They were nearing the stone outlook known as the Belvedere, and he seemed interested in surveying it. "That tower seems quite deserted," he said, "suppose we leave our horses here, and go up there, to finish our talk. We must decide upon our course to-day."

Madeline turned and beckoned to her groom who took their horses in charge.

"Now," said Drexel, when they were at the top of the tower, with a wonderful panorama of spires, and river, and country spread out before their indifferent gaze, "let me dispose of myself first. I shall make one more brief call upon Mr. Lord. Probably, some time to-day. I shall tell him that I am called away, but that he can safely trust to Mr. Hurst. I shall take leave of *you*, if possible, in his presence, and shall charge you with farewells for the Girards and Doctor Vaughan. After to-day, we must meet seldom, and with great caution as to time and place."

"Then I must not go and see Moina La Croix to-day?"

"If you will write again to Miss La Croix, telling her that Mrs. Ralston is still ill, that you are about to make a change, not only on her account, but because Mr. Lord has decided to be absent from the city for some time—and that for this reason you will hardly be able to see her for a few days. It will, I think, serve our purpose better than a visit. You might add, that as soon as you have settled yourself in new quarters you will inform her. I don't want you to lose sight of her, or to lose your friendly footing at her house."

"Mr. Drexel, have you not reasons for suspecting Mr. La Croix, other than the fact of his being a socialist? and having addressed a meeting of these people?"

"Miss Payne," he said, gravely and slowly, "I hope the time will come when I can tell you my own story. For all my knowledge of these people and their doings is founded upon that—upon personal experience. I have told you something, but not all. And this is not the time to talk of myself. Besides, I am not free now to reveal much that—I—know."

"Pardon me," she began.

"Will you pardon *me* if I ask your further indulgence. You are entitled to my fullest confidence, and in time, I shall beg of you to hear all that I have to tell. This much I can say now. I have known for a long time that efforts were being made to draw the different labouring leagues and brotherhoods of our great cities into a union; to band them together, and then to join them to the great body with one head, that is spread all over Europe. I have known,

too, that those high in authority there intended soon to set up their standard here; to send here members of that inner circle which dominates all the others, unknown, in many instances, to the men so dominated. Knowing this, I have been watching for the coming of these men. Shortly after the arrival of the La Croix in this country, I learned from high authority that the men from whom so much was expected *and required* were now in New York. The fact of their appearing publicly at a socialists' meeting, puzzled me a little at first; for these leaders usually operate secretly, and are hardly ever known to the rank and file. However, I suppose they thought a new departure was advisable in this instance. I have observed in the meantime, that they have been careful not to repeat the experiment of appearing *together* in public. The Englishman has been present, has presided at two or three meetings, never twice in the same place. Savorin has addressed several other gatherings. I think he is the chosen orator of the embassy, and a fiery, flowery, eloquent fellow he is. But Mr. La Croix has not yet made his second appearance in public. The timely arrival of these men—the manner of it—and their own actions, have caused me to fix upon them as the men we must deal with."

"I see, and am convinced. I ask no more. But I hate to think that Moina La Croix's father may have connived at, perhaps ordered the death, the assassination, of one of my friends. He looks honest, he looks *noble*."

"I believe he *is* honest, that he believes in his cause; but, my friend, if these men are what I think them, and we could peep into their *black list*, we could find, perhaps, the name of more than one whom we know, registered there."

"Is there such a list? Can it be? If that is so, one would be justified in committing a burglary to obtain it."

"Leave that—the list, and, if necessary, the burglary to me."

She came close to him, a strange excitement glowing in her eyes.

"Ah, I begin to feel my nerves grow tense, to scent the battle. I feel like a duellist on the eve of deadly combat."

"And that is what you are, what we both are. From to-day I go into action, burning my bridges behind me. But, come, time flies, and you must hear something about the Princess Orloff, and what will be required of you at the 'Oriental.'"

"Am I to go in my own character?"

"In your own character, and in all your state, with your companion, your maid, your groom, and your horses." He paused to gaze at her, with frank admiration of her courage. "Would you—did you mean by your question, that you would be willing to assume a disguise."

She threw out her hand with a gesture of mingled amusement and pride.

"Why not," she said, "am I not a detective from the moment I put my foot across that threshold? If necessary, I shall assume any rôle that I am equal to. Remember this, I have enlisted, fully, freely. I expect to share in the work, and the danger. I shall not

shrink nor draw back. I will confess to you, I think. At first, I put it to myself that I was doing all this from a sense of *duty*. But I know better now. I want to do it. It is *living*, it is *doing* something, being of some use in the world. Forget that I have ever been a woman of society. For, before I became *that*, I was Madeline Payne *the detective*."

CHAPTER XLI.

A BIRD ENSNARED.

FOR the first three days following Mr. Lord's unfortunate dinner, Moina La Croix found little time for thought. She had found her father really ill, and before midday, in spite of his objections, she had sent for a physician. The girl had had more than one experience in nursing him through serious illnesses, and in such emergencies all her strength, firmness, womanliness, came to the surface. For Moina could be firm even with the invalid, when she knew it was for his welfare; and she had, latent and undeveloped, a strong will, as was soon to be proved.

When the physician left the sick-room, she followed him.

"Doctor," she asked, "is he going to be ill? Please answer me frankly. I am used to his occasional illness, and to nursing him. Only I want to know what to expect—the best and—the worst."

The doctor was of the new school, straightforward and practical.

"I do not think he will be very ill," he said. "Tell me, have you seen him like this before?"

"Yes."

"And do you know if there was any cause?"

"For this?"

"For this, and for the others."

"It would be useless to speak of this to him," she said, meeting his gaze frankly, "and he could never be brought to admit it. But—I believe that every one of these attacks has been brought on by a shock of some sort, or by anxiety, or some form of mental strain."

"Ah, I am not surprised—not at all. It explains much. It tells us how to proceed. Do you know the cause in this case?"

Moina was silent.

"Pardon me, I do not ask to be told it: only to caution you. His recovery, I think, will be prompt, provided there is no repetition of the disturbing cause. He must be kept quiet and at ease; he must not talk, and nothing of a stirring nature must be allowed near him. I mean animated conversation, bustle, movement. The medicine I have given will keep him soothed and comfortable until the overtaxed nerves are rested and restored to their normal condition, if these instructions are carried out."

"I will see that they are. He must not see visitors, doctor?"

There was an appeal in her voice which he understood. She wanted his authority to forbid visitors.

"Unless you are sure they will soothe rather than agitate him."

"But business—perplexing business, he must not——"

"He must not *think* of that, much less talk of it."

"Thank you, doctor." Her face brightened. "I think I understand all the rest."

"I have faith in you as a nurse, young lady; and if you carry out this programme of quiet and rest, I think a few days will see him his usual self. I will visit him again this evening."

When the doctor was gone, she called her little maid-servant.

"Margot," she said, "no one is to see my father. It is the doctor's order."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Understand, Margot. Under *no* circumstances must you allow anyone to come near his room. If anyone insists upon entering the house, show them into the studio and come for me, always quietly. And, mind, you are to mention no names in my father's hearing; simply say you wish to speak to me." And Moina returned with a firm step to her father's bedside.

Her face was calm and her step light as she bent above him and pushed the white hair lightly off his brow. He was resting quietly; the fever flush was gone. The doctor's drugs were already working their charm. Her touch failed to arouse him, and she pulled a light screen close to the head of the couch and then passed into the next room, where, through the open door, she could see any movement, hear any sound.

Here she began to pace up and down, her slippered feet making no noise over the soft carpet. It seemed as if her father's restlessness had passed into her veins, and while she watched the inner room, her ear was strained to catch any sound from below.

She had no reason to expect a visit from anyone. Her father had not spoken of a visitor, and yet she dreaded and half expected some one. Crashaw, perhaps, or some of the others who of late were so often in her father's studio, or closeted with him in that inner room, where *she* seldom entered. She felt a nameless dread of these visitors, an unreasoning anger against them. What had brought about this sudden illness of her father? Why had he gone out last night so unexpectedly, to return so late and not alone? She knew that his going *was* unexpected. When she left the house he had said no word of such intention, and he always told her—always, until they came here, she said to herself. Was the day of their good comradeship passing? Was she to be her father's confidant no longer? Was this to be the end of their mission to America—estrangement, responbilities for him that were more than he could bear? And they had both looked forward to this work, to this New World mission; hoped for it, prayed for it almost. She had some idea of the exactions of the order which he served. It was impossible that she should not have. But heretofore all had seemed right, just, humane; a cause worth dying for.

What new burden had they put upon him? And what ailed *her*, that she took instinctively this hostile mental attitude? What had changed her? What had caused her to doubt, and dread, and fear? What did she know? What had she heard or seen? Only a crowd of uncouth people gathered to hear her father's words; only the weak platitudes of two or three would-be orators; just a few stray news-

paper paragraphs, a few carelessly uttered words at an aristocratic dinner-table.

Her reflections were interrupted by a note from Madeline, it was Madeline's first move in the drama she was about to begin.

She was sorry to inform Moina that Mrs. Ralston was ill, the result, she feared, of the previous day's dissipation, although certainly Mrs. Ralston had seemed as well as usual on that day. For this reason Madeline must forego the pleasure of seeing Moina for a day or two, her first duty was to the sick, etc., etc., Moina should hear from her again soon, etc.

The note was cleverly worded, but Moina, in her preoccupation and anxiety, scarcely gave it a thought. No answer was required, and now she need not call, at least, not for some days, at that mansion upon Fifth Avenue, which she now dreaded to enter.

As she had feared, Rufus Crashaw called that evening, and as he was unwilling to take his dismissal from Margot, Moina went down to the studio where he waited.

"My father is ill," she said coldly and without seeming to see the proffered hand. "He must be kept perfectly quiet, the doctor says, and can see no one."

"No one but me," smiled Crashaw.

"*No one*," repeated the girl.

"I shall not disturb him and he need not talk. I have just a word to say to him." He moved toward the door, but she placed herself before it.

"Mr. Crashaw, you have not understood me. *No one* is admitted to my father's room."

"Miss La Croix, I have a message for him. It will not excite him, but it is important, you must let me see him." He spoke like a man who meant to carry his point, and he expected to see his words take effect, but not as they did.

"So my father's comfort, his life or death, perhaps, are of no moment to you?" she said haughtily.

"Certainly they are, but I have put myself to great inconvenience to come here, I cannot lose my time fruitlessly. I only want one word from your father."

Moina turned and rang the bell, her face was pale, her eyes blazing with the scorn she felt.

"Since you have come at so great inconvenience to yourself, sir," she said, "I will save you another such 'fruitless' errand. When it seems prudent to let my father know that you wish an interview, he shall be told, until you receive a message assuring you that he *is* able to see you, oblige me by not coming again."

"Madam!"

"Be good enough to remember that *I* am mistress here," and as Margot entered she turned toward her, "show Mr. Crashaw out," she said and left the room without a backward glance.

When the doctor came shortly after, she said to him,

"Doctor, are there not trained nurses, *male* nurses, to be had here?"

"Yes, Miss La Croix."

"And—could you find me one?"

"I think so, if you require one, but I think your father is doing very well."

"Doctor," she said, coming nearer to him, "I am peculiarly alone, as you see. *I* can nurse my father, but I want a strong man, an *honest* man, to protect, if necessary, the privacy of his sick-room."

"In that case," said the worthy doctor, "you shall have a good man to-morrow—early."

That night, as she sat alone beside her father's bed, Moina La Croix said to herself, "I have made me an enemy. From to-day it is war between myself and Rufus Crashaw."

The trained nurse was installed next day, and Moina found time for some much-needed rest. In spite of her commands to the contrary she had feared a repetition of Crashaw's visit, but the next day passed and he did not come. Early in the afternoon, Jules Passauf presented himself instead, and, on behalf of Crashaw, made the proper inquiries concerning the sick man, he did not ask to see him, did not seek to cross the threshold, and he left Mr. Crashaw's "compliments" for Miss La Croix.

Early in the evening Rene Savorin came, and Moina hastened to receive him.

"I am glad you have come," she said, after answering his questions about her father. "I wanted to see you, sit down." They were standing face to face in the studio, and she turned as she spoke to assure herself that the door was closed.

Rene seated himself and silently waited her next words. He was paler than usual and graver.

"I want to speak about my father," began Moina, seating herself near him and speaking in guarded tones. "Tell me, were you with him last evening?"

"No."

"But you know where he was?"

"I suppose so."

"And the nature of the business that called him away, unexpectedly, after I left him for the evening?"

Rene was silent.

"Ah," she said sorrowfully, "I thought I might depend upon *you*. I thought you were my friend."

"And so I am, Miss Moina. What is it? What must I say or do?"

"Listen, I know very well that something has occurred to annoy my father greatly, or to greatly distress him. I have seen him like this, ill, I mean, as he is now, before, and always mental excitement was the cause. If there is any trouble, anything connected with the mission he has undertaken, that has wrought upon him like this, I beg you tell me? Oh, I *wish* you had been with him last night. Why were you not?"

"Last night!" said Savorin, gloomily, "I was addressing a meeting."

"Like that which we attended?"

"Like that, or worse."

"Worse?"

"Yes. Dirtier, more ignorant. Don't ask me about it. I have

been in the sulks ever since. Your father was with Crashaw—and one or two others, Americans—or, at least, *citizens* of this country, I believe." There was more than a shade of sarcasm in his tone.

She leaned toward him and put a lovely hand upon his arm. "Rene," she said, "I see you don't like this American socialism. You are disappointed in it."

He smiled at this, and made an effort to rally himself. "And you," he questioned, "how do you like it?"

"It has made my father ill. For the present that is answer enough. My friend, I am asking much, I know, but I beg of you tell me as much as you can without breaking some pledge or promise. My father was happy in his work in the Old World. He was content, enthusiastic. Only at rare intervals was he distressed, or shocked, until he broke down, as he has at present. And then, it was not because of his work, his connection with the great cause, it was from some outside influence. But *here*—ever since we came to this place, there has been a constraint upon him. He has been graver, sadder, more thoughtful than usual from the very first. He has gradually grown *nervous*—I was about to say irritable, absent, and manifestly troubled. Why is it? Are the wrongs of the people so much greater here than in Russia, England, Germany? Is the work harder? Tell me."

"Not harder, perhaps," Rene spoke slowly, as if weighing his words. "Not harder—but—different."

"Different! How different?"

"Pardon me. What was your father's line of work, in Russia, or in, say, Austria—before you came to France?"

"Much the same as there, speaking to the people, writing for the press, meeting and talking with the leaders of the new movement; here, there, everywhere. Trying in many ways to do good deeds, to lighten the burdens of the down-trodden, the oppressed. Helping the helpless. *Doing good.*"

"You know," Rene said, gently, "I only knew him, and his work in France and England." He was very grave again, and he made no new effort to rally his spirits. "I think you are, perhaps, needlessly anxious. Your father is an old man and not over-strong, and his position here is not just the same as it was over there."

"Not the same! How? In what way is it changed?"

"He has more responsibility. He holds a higher position; before he was a worker only, now he holds a place of command. I suppose you knew this?"

"A place of command! Explain!"

"I will—so far as I may; but this information ought not to come to you from *my* lips. Your father is our leader here; our captain. We, Crashaw, myself, Passauf, all of us, are only his lieutenants. When these American leagues become fully one with us, he will be *their* leader, too."

Moina gave a gasp and rose to her feet, deadly pale.

"Do you mean," she panted, "that he controls—*everything*." Rene nodded. "If this union is effected, will he—will he order these *strikes*, boycotts, what do they call them here? Stop. Wait. If—if

a man—an enemy to the cause must be—disciplined, warned, does the order—the—sanction for the deed come from him?"

"Yes."

She sank weakly into her place again, and for a long time neither spoke. She seemed to have forgotten his presence.

"Thank you," she said finally, putting out a cold hand, which he took and held for a moment. "Thank you very much, and now let us never speak of this again. I see now that I ought not to have forced you to tell me what my father evidently meant that I should not know. And—will you excuse me now—I—I must go to him. The new nurse is competent—but—strange." She got up again slowly. "You will come again—come often."

When he had gone, she did not go at once to her father's bedside. Instead, she cast herself down upon the nearest resting-place and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh!" she moaned, "this is worse than I had dared to dream. Far worse! Far worse! It is horrible! *horrible!* HORRIBLE!"

CHAPTER XLII.

DEEP WATERS.

MILES LA CROIX was ill longer than the doctor had anticipated. Fever came, and then delirium.

"It is worse than I thought," he said to Moina, "the mental strain must have been a severe one."

"You still think, then, that the cause was—mental?"

"Yes, Miss La Croix, it is always best to be frank in these cases. There seems absolutely no physical cause, and that is why I insist so strongly upon perfect quiet and no visitors. We must not run the risk of admitting the wrong one."

"I understand," she murmured.

"Now, if you knew or could even guess at the *cause*."

"I do not," she said hurriedly, "I neither know nor guess."

"Then we must be doubly watchful," were the doctor's parting words.

Rufus Crashaw did not repeat his visit; but Passauf came every day, never asking to see the sick man, and never passing beyond the vestibule, where he waited only to hear, from the lips of Moina, Margot, or, sometimes, the doctor, the latest bulletin from the patient.

One day, almost a week from the date of Crashaw's unlucky encounter with Moina, Passauf, who had paid his usual daily call, returned again, after less than a two hours' absence. He brought a letter for Moina, and insisted upon putting it into her own hand.

"I am bidden to say to you," said Passauf, "that this letter contains matter so important to Miles La Croix and his welfare, that you can best serve him by giving it prompt attention. I will wait for your reply." The tone, more than the words, impressed Moina. She took the note and opened it in his presence.

"Whatever it is," she thought, "he shall know that I have read it, and his messenger shall not see me disturbed." This is what she read:—

"MISS LA CROIX,—Passauf reports that your father is growing delirious. If this continues, for his sake, for your own, and for the cause to which he is devoted, *watch well this phase of his illness.* A man of his temperament would be likely to rave of *what has been much in his thoughts.* If this is so, *no stranger must hear such ravings.* Everything depends upon your caution. You have employed a trained nurse. This man must be dismissed. I can send you a man who is competent and *safe.* But it would be *wiser* to let only those attend him who have *nothing to learn* from his ravings. Do not ignore this, for your father's sake *and safety.* "CRASHAW."

Moina stood in silence for a moment, holding the letter in her hand.

"That letter," observed Passauf, "must be destroyed."

She held it out to him without a second glance. "Take it," she said.

"And your reply?"

"Will be verbal. Say to Mr. Crashaw that I understand him. No one, save myself, will attend my father in his waking moments. I shall do nothing to endanger my father's life, health, or safety, he may be assured."

"And is that all?"

"That is *all.*"

When he had gone, Moina despatched a note to Rene Savorin.

"Come at once," it said, "upon receipt of this." Then she went back to her father's bedside, and although he was passive, and seemed to be sleeping, she did not once leave him until Margot came softly to announce Savorin.

"You were long in coming," was her greeting, as she entered the little second floor drawing-room, where she had bidden Margot bring him.

"I was out when your note came. Am I too late? I lost no time, I assure you," he said, anxiously.

"You are in time," she replied, "and I am going to test your friendship. Do you know what Rufus Crashaw has written me?"

"Concerning your father?"

"Yes."

"He spoke to me of your father's deliriums, of its possible consequences. I can guess what he might have written."

"To make it certain I will tell you." She repeated, almost word for word, Crashaw's letter, and her own reply.

"Ah," said Savorin, quickly; "I wish you would let *me* help you."

"*Will* you? I sent for you to ask it. I could think of no other way. *Can* you? Oh, I can hardly talk coherently. He is resting now—I mean, of course, my father—but he may wake at any moment. He has only muttered vaguely as yet; but this may change. Tell me, can you come here and *stay* until this delirium passes? until we are safe again?" She stopped abruptly: he had approached and taken her hand gently between both his own.

"Let us not exaggerate anything," he said. "There is possible danger, to be sure. He may say what a stranger should not hear, and he may only mutter incoherences."

"He will not," she broke in. "Unless the fever leaves him at

once, he will pass from incoherence into random talk as distinct as your words or mine. He will talk of his interests, his anxieties—*everything;* and he will talk of me, *to* me—all manner of confidences."

"Ah; then I shall know how to explain things to the nurse, whom, of course, you cannot altogether dispense with. During his wakeful moments you and I will sit in his room, keeping the nurse within call, but out of hearing. When he sleeps the nurse may take the watch, with myself always near at hand, to be aroused at once if he should chance to wake."

And so it was arranged. Miles La Croix was not dangerously ill. It was, the physician said, a fit of nervous prostration, brought on by over-excitement. Give him a week or ten days of quiet, rest, and good nursing; that would be sufficient.

But Moina's fears proved well founded. The fever did not abate for several days, and during that time the sick man laid bare his very heart before his daughter and Rene Savorin—all his enthusiasm, his hopes, his fears, his doubts. After that sickness Moina La Croix could never say that she did not understand her father better, even, than he understood himself.

"All this is safe with me," whispered Rene, when they stood one night beside the bed, both pale and startled because of what they were listening to. "Some day, when this is over, perhaps you will let me tell you a little about myself, so that you may know how well I understand your position. And, until then, trust me, look upon me as a safe friend—a brother, if you will."

"Oh," she said, putting out a hand to him, "what would I have done, what should I do now, without you? If I did not trust you fully I could not bear this."

She did trust him fully, nevertheless; but this she did not know. On the evening that saw him installed under Miles La Croix's roof as assistant nurse or guardian, he sent to Rufus Crashaw the following lines:—

"*At Miss La Croix's request* I shall remain here and share with her her watch at her father's bedside. The nurse proper will only attend him during his hours of sleep. I think you need feel no further anxiety. All our interests, at present, are identical. You will, of course, look to the business of those two meetings; supply my place, or find some other substitute. At present I can best serve the cause *here*.

"SAVORIN."

While her father's illness and delirium were at their height, Moina received a second note from Madeline Payne. It informed her that Mr. Lord was soon to leave the city. That the house on Fifth Avenue was to be closed. That Mrs. Ralston, in company with Mrs. Girard, was contemplating a visit to the country; and that she, Madeline, had decided to remain in the city, possibly taking up her abode for a time in one of the Avenue hotels, where she should hope once more to receive Moina.

This letter occasioned Moina some mental agitation; but she forced it out of her mind as much as might be, all her strength, and time, and thought, being needed for her long vigils.

Two days later the fever began to abate, and after that the change for the better was rapid. The delirium became once more incoherent, the murmurings less and less frequent.

"The worst is over," the doctor said. "In a few more days he will be his mental self again; in another week he will be up. Not strong, of course, and needing the same quiet and careful tending. But the collapse will not be likely to repeat itself; his recovery will be rapid."

And now a new trouble possessed her. She shut herself up in her room, and faced it, and fought it, and took a desperate resolve. The book below in her father's study, the book in which her own hand had written so many names, she now knew to be a record of those who were enemies, were dangerous to *the cause;* a list of marked men—a *black list.* In some manner, and at all times suited to the convenience of the leaders, these men were to be made examples of. *How,* she did not know; and she feared to exercise her imagination.

Upon one point she was determined. Mr. Lord must be warned. She had eaten his bread, and he had been kind to her. He was the friend of her friend. At any cost to herself, he must be warned. Her father would never be suspected, would never know. She would act with the greatest precaution—but she *would* act.

Safely locked in her own room, she penned the following lines :—

"MR. LORD,—SIR,—The writer of this has discovered, *quite by chance,* that you are in danger, and your property also. *Do not leave your house unprotected,* and look well to yourself. Do not go abroad at night, nor remain much alone. Your enemies are many.

"A FRIEND."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A NIGHT AT OLIM'S.

"THE deal's mine, Dandy."

"No, it's mine."

"Take it, then, an' give us a light."

"Give us a *drink,* oi say. Here, Jumpin' Jack, bring us some more beers."

"Let's stop to drink 'em, Mike. Don't treat *every* ten minutes."

"Hold on. Listen to Muldoon, in there. What's he racketing now?"

"Oh, niver moind *him.*"

"That's what *I* say. What's the good o' so much *chin?* When it comes to business, I'm ready. Talkin' 'll never give the poor laborin' man his rights. Ain't that so, Cully?"

The man addressed as "Cully" sat with his elbows resting upon his knees, leaning forward and seeming to be intent upon a game of cards which had been progressing at the table around which four men were seated—the four who had uttered the series of remarks set down above.

There were other similar tables int he long, low, smoke-grimed room, and all of them, more or less, occupied by men, for the most

part coarse, ill-dressed, and belonging manifestly to the lower, if not the lowest, type of humanity. Some were lounging and smoking, many drinking beer or some other and stronger beverage. Some were engaged, like the first-mentioned four, in a combination of occupations, smoking, drinking, *and* playing cards.

The table where Cully and his friends sat was at the extreme end of the room, and nearer than any of the others to a large double doorway opening into a rear apartment, not so large as the other, and differently furnished. Benches were ranged around three sides of this room, and near the rear wall was a table, behind which were two or three chairs, two of them occupied at that moment. The third was pushed back behind a big portly fellow, who was lustily haranguing a dozen or more men lounging upon the benches, and emphasizing with his fist upon the table before him; each blow causing the three beer glasses thereon to dance alarmingly.

As the card-players at the table near the door resumed their game, the young man designated as Cully turned his attention to this inner room.

The speaker was a Polish Jew, small and weazened. His English was broken, but easily understood; his voice was shrill and cracked.

"The motto of anarchism," he said, "was the destruction of the present social condition. This object, to be sure, could not be obtained easily. But the working-men were in the majority; they could easily rule the world if they wanted to, if they had only the sense to dare it. There were certain obstacles to be removed. The capitalistic press continually deceived the people. It lied so much that the working-men who read it were frightened, and would have nothing to do with the anarchists, who were the real and the *only true* friends of the people."

At this point, Cully turned in his chair, and drew it away from the table and nearer the door of the inner room.

"Look at Cully," whispered one of the players, "he's gittin' his eddication."

"The rich have everything," went on the orator; "they make the laws and own them. The laws protect the rich and oppress the poor. They own the police, they own the soldiers, they think themselves better than you. They ride by you in their coaches, and their fine ladies in their silks and diamonds stare at you, and wouldn't touch your wives and daughters with a finger-tip. *Why* are they better than we? If we took their money, couldn't our girls dress and flirt as well as *theirs?* Couldn't *we* drive their horses and drink fine wines and fancy drinks, and bribe judges and run for office, if we had their money? And couldn't we *have* it? Why, to-day, here, in this city, there are enough of us, enough labouring men, poor, oppressed, pinched by want and work, if they stood up together in one body against them, to take away their houses, and their horses, their mills, and rail-roads and factories, in *spite* of their police, and their soldiers, and their laws. Their *laws!* Laws made to frighten us, to keep us down. We musn't break the *laws*. That just means we must not hurt *them*, or spoil their pleasure."

The shrill voice ceased abruptly. The orator looked about him for a moment, and sat down.

Then there was a movement within the room; evidently a recess was to be taken. Some of the listeners clustered about the table and began a wordy discussion.

The others, by twos and threes, sauntered out into the saloon proper and approached the bar or scattered about the tables. The man Cully got up and went forward slowly in the rear of one of the groups. Two men paused at the bar just in front of him. "No, thankee," he heard one of them say, "I'll not stop for any more. I'll take my cup of beer and get me home." The speaker was a tall man dressed like a workman, and with a grimy but honest face. Cully passed him and went out upon the street. In a moment the workman also came out.

"Well, comrade," said the young man, "and so you've had enough of anarchy, too. Don't mind my walkin' alongside, I hope."

"Not a bit," replied the workman, after casting upon the other a quick keen glance. "Fact is," he added, referring back to his companion's first remark, "fact is, a man, a thinkin' man, wants to take that sort o' thing in small doses, and sort o' digest it as he goes along. Ye're a union man, I take it?"

"Well—not exactly," said the other. "I'm ruther new here, and am jest looking around, sort of tryin' to make up my mind where I do want ter stand. This 'ere business is gittin' a good deal like religion."

"Ha, ha! jest so. Got ter jine the church or go to—blazes." The workman chuckled over his fine point.

"I don't knows I take in quite all them fellers say," went on Cully, as if arguing with himself; "and still, a man don't fear to stand much chance of gitting work unless he *is* a union man. An', then, there's the fund if he happens to get sick or hurt."

"Yes," said the other. "There's the *fund*, as ye say. Only—ye can't always count on the fund."

"Eh!"

"Jest let me give ye a bit of *my* experience. I've been *in* the union, and I've been *out* of it."

"And are you in it now?"

"Yes, I'm in it *now*. I've got a wife and little ones." There was a positive bitterness in the man's voice. "But—if I ever go out again—I stay out. And—I may astonish some folks."

"You was going ter tell me somethin'."

"Yes; it won't take long, the way I'll tell it. I jined the union as soon as I was married; thought I'd ort to. I had a chum, lived next door—married like myself—and we worked together. Nobody gave more money, 'cordin' to our pile, nor was more interested in unions, than we was. But after a while, a lot of blowhards got to runnin' things and sendin' us on fool strikes, till we got sick of it. It ain't so fine for a workman that can command good wages right along, to have to lay idle about half his time, because a few grumblers want a strike. And that's what it finally came to. And when the big strike came on, over the boss taking on a few non-union men, my mate and me *did* try to prevent that; but, all the same, we went out peaceable enough with the rest."

"Was that a city strike?"

"No, it wa'n't here; I didn't live here then. Well, after a while, a man we both knew, a good honest fellow, got sick and his savin's run out, and Jim and me went to the secretary to git him some help. Well, sir, this is the answer we got—'The sick man had got a sewin' machine, and a carpet, in his parlour, and the help was for them that *was poor*.' 'Your helpin' Pete Slavin,' I said. Slavin was a poor, drunken sot that drank up all he could earn, when he was sober enough to work, and was first and foremost in every strike, or talk of one. 'Yes,' they said, 'Pete had nothing, and them was the ones to help.' So Jim and me must help pay for Pete Slavin's strikes and sprees. *That* got my mate's blood up."

"I sh'd *say*," put in Cully.

"Yes, sir. He jest swore't he'd never pay another cent, nor set foot in the lodge-room again, and he'd go right on workin' and would like to see 'em stop him. He did go back to work that very day"—here the narrator paused and sighed—"and afore the week was out they fetched him home feet foremost."

"Killed?"

"No; only thumped half-dead. He was out ag'in in about a month, but that got *my* mad up, too—and—well—their strike was a failure, and they blamed us for it."

"I see!"

"These big strikes mostly do end so. The old men came back, beat or not beat. The bosses, of course, always swears to stand by the non-union men that's helped 'em through; but the bosses find it cheapest to give in, in the end. The union men *won't* work with scabs, and so the scabs get weeded out, kind of on the sly. The union men promises big, and the scab has to go."

"Yes," agreed Cully; "that's the way."

"That was the way with *me*," said the other. "I tried two or three cities, and my mate took to rovin', too. Finally, I came here; but I hadn't no union ticket, and I couldn't hold a place long. Winter was coming, I had a family to keep." He paused, and sighed heavily. "I had to give in; I *had* to go into another union."

"Well," said Cully, with equal ruefulness, "I expect that's about how *I'll* pan out."

"See here," said the other earnestly, "you're a single man, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, take my advice, Rough it out. Keep out of it. Don't join. I tell ye—the unions ain't what they was at first. Then ye paid yer dues, and yer assessments, an' stood by the boys, and that was all there was of it. *Now*, it's strike here, and strike there, and you're called upon to do things, like as not, that a man hates to think of. Don't go in, boy, so long as ye can stay out." He stopped like one whose enthusiasm has led him too far, and turned a furtive side glance upon his companion as they passed into the glare of an electric burner. "Maybe, I'm taking you out of your way," he said, in an altered tone.

But the other protested against this. He had nothing to do, and was glad of the advice just given.

He didn't want to part from a new-found friend like that. In short, he was so frank, so eager for advice and information, that his companion thawed again, and before they parted they had exchanged names, and agreed to meet again on the following evening at Chris Olim's saloon.

When our friend Cully found himself alone upon the street, he consulted a shabby silver timepiece, and turned his steps once more towards Olim's.

He found things very much as he had left them, except that there were fewer men drinking about the tables, and more crowded into the rear room, where a fresh orator was vociferating.

The bar-keeper, taking advantage of a few moments' lull in his trade, was nodding in his chair, and as Cully paused before the bar, with due deference to the proprietors of the place, he could hear the words uttered by two men sitting at a table just behind him.

"Yes," said one, "we all knew he was a non-union man, and he had plenty of hints, but he was stubborn and wouldn't join."

"Why didn't ye punch his head?" asked the other, with a drunken leer.

"Oh, we fixed *him*. One of the fellows on a 'local' was put up to drop upon his time. He played it well, lagged behind, you know, pretended his engine wouldn't fire. Bill run into him and scattered about a dozen cars for him. Bill got his head broke badly, and like to broke his neck. His brakesman *did* git killed."

The bar-keeper still dozed.

Cully gave himself an angry shake and sauntered on toward the inner room. All the benches were occupied now, many were standing, and almost to a man the listeners were stimulated to zeal, anger, enthusiasm, quite as much by the liquor they had imbibed, as by the fire and force of the speaker. The place was nothing less than a school, a hot-bed of anarchy.

The speaker was a radical. He preached pure anarchy, nihilism, destruction of industrial systems, annihilation of riches, resistance of all law, and overthrow of government. He played skilfully upon their greed, their prejudices, and their passions. He roused in them malice, hatred, and envy. He told them the law and government was as much a tyranny *for the poor* as was the rule of the Czar. The rich owners of mills and factories ruled their vassals like feudal lords and kings. "*Kill, destroy, make anew.* The rich are our natural enemies, *let us treat them as such*," he cried. As Cully neared the door of the inner room there arose a burst of applause. Then suddenly he became aware of a new look on the face of the speaker. The words ceased, but the eyes menaced, the mouth worked, and the outstretched arm and bony hand pointed at something just beyond or behind him.

Cully turned, and there, not far from the doorway, standing erect and immovable, with the whole length of the saloon between himself and the door of entrance, stood a solitary policeman.

"*Fool!*" was the word that broke involuntarily from Cully's lips, and then he was pushed and hustled aside. The tables were

deserted, the crowd from the inner room surged about him and about the unlucky officer, Bedlam reigned.

"A policeman!"

"A spy!"

"A sneak!"

"Put him out!"

"*Kill him!*"

"Break his head!"

These were a few of the cries that arose about him; and the officer was surrounded. Some one more agile than himself wrested his whistle from his hand as he was about to put it to his lips. He stood hemmed in by menacing faces, brandished fists, knives, and pistols.

"Try to keep them at bay," whispered someone close beside him. "Try to work back toward the door."

"Don't shoot," cried someone; "'twill bring more cops."

"Back to back," whispered the officer's champion. "I'll face the door, do you keep close to me." And then Cully wheeled suddenly, placed his back against that of the officer, and faced the crowd, with a revolver in either hand. "Stand back," he cried. "Fair play! Shame upon you, thirty men to *one!*"

The anarchists were not all warriors; they were not all brave. There were only two against them, but these two held each two formidable-looking weapons.

Cully, with his resolute face and his two six-shooters, looked dangerous; and as he pressed toward the door, the officer keeping close at his back, the crowd gave way before them.

"Trip up his legs," cried someone.

"I'll shoot the first man that tries it," said the officer.

But now the bar-keeper, fully aroused, asserted himself. He came from behind the bar and moved toward the door on tiptoe. With a hand upon the latch, he paused and seemed to listen. Suddenly he sprang back, waving his arms frantically.

"The back way, boys," he shouted. "The cops are coming." At the same moment, and greatly to his surprise, the street door was thrown open and a pistol-shot rang out.

It was enough. The audience of the burning orator, with the orator at its head, heedless of the order of their going, rushed back to the inner room, and from thence into a friendly alley.

While they were still pushing and crowding at the narrow rear door, the officer and Cully faced each other.

"Did you fire?" asked the policeman.

"Yes, in the air. It helped. But they'll be back again, some of them. Don't stay here."

"I'll come back," said the officer, pocketing one pistol and keeping the other discreetly in hand, "and bring a posse."

"Bring 'em," said Cully, putting up his weapons and turning carelessly away.

The man who had opened the door in the face of the astonished bar-keeper still stood upon the threshold. He pushed past the latter and beckoned to the policeman, who approached him at once.

"Come outside," said the new-comer, shortly. When they were upon the street he said, "Your orders were not to enter that place, except in case of riot."

"They were holding a bloody anarchist meeting," argued the officer. "I wanted to get evidence——"

"That's *my* business," said the other. "Now, go on and don't repeat this. You'll spoil everything."

When the officer had moved away, the man of authority turned back and entered the saloon. He was a tall man in shabbily rakish garments, his face half covered by a growth of stubbly beard. He dropped upon a chair near the door, and turned a careless gaze upon our friend Cully, who now stood beside the bar. The rum dispenser was again in his place, and was pouring out a glass of something for Cully.

"What did you take that cop's part for?" he asked, sourly, as he pushed the glass across to his customer.

Cully laughed, and took up the glass. "'Cause I'm allus ready for a fair an' square row," he said; "an' I don't like to see a gritty man get left. I ain't much on cops, but, hang me, if I was goin' to see any man try to go it alone ag'in half a hundred."

He drained the glass and set it down.

"Well," said the bar-keeper, "all I say is, don't show your phiz around here till *this thing* blows over. The boys might be hard on you."

Cully laughed derisively. "I'm comin' here to-morrow night," he said; "I've got an appointment."

"You'd better *not*."

"Why?"

"Well, the boys will be likely to accuse ye of bein' a spy, of tryin' to jump both ways."

"Look a here, my friend," said Cully, "if anybody doubts me, jest let 'em speak up. I'm ready for 'em. I'm *one* of *'em*, an' they know it. The first man that accuses me 'll git *this*." The bar-keeper started back as the cold muzzle of a revolver was suddenly thrust under his nose. And before he had recovered himself, Cully, with a defiant burst of laughter, turned upon his heel and swaggered out.

Instantly and silently the stranger followed. Cully walked away from the saloon with the same swaggering air, but when he had left it some distance behind his pace changed. He ceased to swagger, and walked like a man busy with his own thoughts.

It was late, and the streets were almost deserted. Cully crossed in the glare of a street lamp, and turned down a narrower thoroughfare than that which he had just left. It was occupied, for the most part, with shabby dwelling-houses, and was not well lighted. At about the middle of the block, where the light was dimmest, there was a narrow alley to be crossed, and, just at this alley, two men suddenly sprang upon him, and taken unawares, he was borne to the ground beneath a rain of blows.

He struggled manfully, and, seeing something glittering in the hand of one of his assailants, he called loudly.

His call was answered close at hand, a powerful blow felled one

of his assailants, and the grip of two strong hands about the throat of the second caused the rascal to loose his hold, and utter an inarticulate howl for mercy.

"Are you hurt?" asked the new-comer, breathlessly. And then seeing the assailed man struggle to a sitting posture he flung the second assailant from him, saying, "Be off, there, and quick, or I'll make an end of *you*."

The fellow rushed away without a glance towards his prostrate and motionless companion, and then the rescuer bent down and whispered eagerly,

"Kenneth, old boy, are you badly hurt?"

"Eh—what!" making an effort to get upon his feet. "Good heavens, Drexel, is that *you?*"

"Yes, it's I. Let me help you, Ken. What is it?"

"I—I'm afraid my shoulder is broken or misplaced. Confound those fellows." Here he groaned, and almost sank down again.

"Lean on me," said Drexel. "Let me help you to those steps. I've got some brandy. There, sit down a moment. Do you think you can walk at all?"

"Yes," after a moment. "I'm badly shaken up, but my legs are all right, I think. Let me rest here, and go take a look at that fellow. Have you killed him?"

"If I have," said Drexel, "there's one revolutionist the less. Those fellows followed you from Olim's place."

He bent above the prostrate man, and felt for his hands and his breast. "Ho! It's the one with the knife. No, he's only stunned, then. And he'll do very well where he is. I'll send a policeman to look after him when we run across one. They seem to be scarce about here. I want to get you away at once, though; as soon as you can walk we'll go a little way from here, and then I'll get a carriage."

When they were moving slowly away, Kenneth leaning heavily upon his companion's arm, limping at every step, and wincing with the pain, he asked,

"How came *you* on the scene, Drexel? I can't understand it."

"I've been 'on the scene,' more or less, for a few days," replied Drexel, "and to-night, even without this adventure, I meant to place myself in evidence. What did you do to provoke that assault?"

"Why—if you were on the scene——"

"I made my first appearance to-night, just in time to get that meddlesome policeman out of the way, and to follow you. I knew those two Huns were in pursuit of you."

"I never thought of that. Of being followed, I mean," and then he related briefly, and laying light stress upon his own part in the affair, the occurrence of the policeman's visit.

Drexel refrained from comment until they had found a cab, and were driving toward Hosmer's quarters. Then he said, "Well, what do you think of socialism by *this* time?"

Hosmer was silent for a moment, then his natural frankness evinced itself,

"Old man," he said. "I was wrong, and you right. The ideal socialism does not exist, even in theory, except in the brains of a few

idiots like myself. The real socialism is a festering horror, officered for the most part by scoundrels greedy for gain. Its ranks swelled by the idle, the vicious, by an outcast foreign population that grows larger with every vessel that comes into our ports."

"True."

"The trades' unions were very well, and not unreasonable, perhaps, oftener than the employers, were greedy; left to themselves they might be respected of men. But heaven only knows what the influence, contact—*control*, of anarchists and socialists will make of them. There are *no* Yankee anarchists. Take away the foreign element, and socialism and anarchy would be unknown in America."

"You have progressed rapidly, Ken."

"Thanks to you! Chris Olim's is a good school. And how a rational man could attend a succession of their rabid meetings, and *not* progress away from them, surpasses *my* comprehension."

"And mine. So you are ready to drop this business?"

"No, I'm going on."

"Ken—what folly."

"I must! Oh, don't think it won't be a punishment, but I can't draw back if I would. I'm in the maelstrom. There are others beside you, Drexel, who have their eyes upon me."

Drexel thought of the morning when he had seen his friend at Miles La Croix's door with Crashaw and Savorin, and sighed.

"At any rate," he said, "you were not in earnest about going back to Olim's?"

"I was! Drexel, I met a man to-night who interests me; I want to see more of him; we were to meet at Olim's. When I get this shoulder dressed, and feel a little easier, I'll tell you about him. I wish you could see him."

"Well, Ken, at least you won't present yourself at Olim's to-morrow night; nor anywhere else, I'm thinking. But I'll hear about your new acquaintance; and if it seems worth while, I'll be your proxy at Olim's. *I'll* meet him at the rendezvous."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NEW TERROR.

MILES LA CROIX—the Miles La Croix who had lain down upon that sick bed, never rose up again. As the doctor had predicted, he rallied soon, and his normal strength returned to him. Physically, he was a stronger man than before. But the change in him was soon apparent to Moina, and to others—a change as strange as it was terrible.

He had laid his head upon his pillow a fortnight since, an enthusiast, a dreamer, eager to immolate himself, if need be, in what he believed the *good cause*—the cause of humanity; but scrupulous as to means; resolute against brutal measures; deprecating all force and violence. What fine cord had snapped, had broken under that mental strain—that struggle between love for his cause and love for all mankind?

Doubtless, the pious Puritans who worshipped the Lord with their lips and heaped up burning faggots about the luckless witches with their hands, believed in—themselves. We have no record of a doubtful witch-burner, and even so, Miles La Croix believed himself born anew, appointed to a work. Pitiful no longer, humane no longer. The angel within him slain, or fled away; he was now a fanatic, an avenger, a madman.

Only where his daughter was concerned did he show any tenderness; and even here he was changed. He was less nervous than before, less excitable. He never complained of fatigue now, never refused to see visitors, and, always, there burned in his eyes a sombre fire, a restless energy.

"My father is mad," said poor Moina. But a commission of lunacy would have been slow to declare Miles La Croix mad. Never was there a more methodical madman.

And now Rufus Crashaw was recalled, and Moina's humiliation began. He came and went freely every day, and twice a day, and often not alone. Poor Moina shut herself up in her own room; and downstairs, in the little room behind the studio, every day, long consultations were held. Almost every evening Miles La Croix and Crashaw went out together.

Shut up in her room, cut off from outside help, or relaxation, her mind filled with horror at the change in her father, and at the revelations of the sick-room; heart sick, and full of forebodings, Moina La Croix almost feared for her own reason, and then as sorrow made room for thought, the natural resistance of a young, vigorous, and honest mind in a strong healthy body began to assert itself. She was a girl, and alone; with her father estranged, and in the midst of foes, for she now began to look upon all the socialists, with Crashaw at their head, as foes. Even Rene Savorin she counted as arrayed against her. That her father was mad, she firmly believed; but how could she make others believe with her. The doctor, who had never known Miles La Croix before his illness, and who, therefore, saw no change in him, only smiled when she questioned him about her father's mental condition.

"Your father has a *strong* mind," he said, sagely; "and a stronger will."

What could she do? for she must do something. If only she could consult Madeline Payne, and that kind Mrs. Ralston! But Madeline had not been heard from after that second letter, and she did not know where to seek her. And then, remembering with a shudder what she had heard at her father's bedside, she sighed.

"No, I dare not go to her, even if I could! I shall dread to meet her!"

But brave blood flowed in Moina's veins; she would not give up to despair without a struggle. She determined to face the situation, to defend her father, and to fight as best she could against Rufus Crashaw and his newly-acquired influence.

And so a fortnight passed. Two weeks since her father arose from his sick bed, and more than a month since the catastrophe at Mr. Lord's, of which Moina had not heard a whisper.

Mrs. Ralston, convalescent, but still nervous from the shock of the explosion, remained secluded and content at Olive Girard's.

Madeline Payne had been for more than a week established at the "Oriental," with a hired companion and her maid, and Mr. Lord had been for days an inmate of a retired mountain cottage, weak and languid, but recovering, and with Dr. Vaughan in attendance.

The mansion on Fifth Avenue had not been closed. Mr. Lord had left his home without sound of trumpets, and was believed, by all save a few chosen friends, to be still at home, but indisposed.

Hovey, the footman, had been left in charge. The housekeeper, cook, and housemaid were still at their posts ; and, regularly in the morning, the curtains and shutters of drawing-room and dining-room were opened to the daylight ; and in the evening, the lamps were lighted in all the lower rooms, and in Mr. Lord's chamber and dressing-room above.

The better to carry out the fiction of his presence, and to guard as well the steel safe lately sunk into the wall of his bed-room, Mr. Lord had installed Hovey in his rooms, and there each night the faithful English butler, mindful of the dignity of his surroundings, went early to bed in gingerly and solemn state ; sleeping soundly, and never dreaming, poor man, of the gleaming dagger that, less than a year ago, had quivered in the wood above the head of his sleeping master ; above the very pillow where his own head now lay. Poor Hovey ! Prim and self-conscious, narrow in mind and limited in thought, yet perfect in his duties. How faithful he was ! how respectful of his master's quarters, even in that master's absence ! How proud of his master's confidence !

One evening, as he was about to extinguish the lights in the dining-room, where nobody had dined, Hovey heard the door-bell, and hastened to answer it. He had received minute instructions as to possible visitors, and knew quite well how to receive them, whatever their mission might be.

Upon the threshold he found an old man, tall and erect of carriage, with long white hair and dark brilliant eyes.

"I wish to see Mr. Elias Lord," said this stately personage.

"Hi'm very sorry, sir ; but Mr. Lord is not at 'ome this hevenin'."

"Will he be at home soon?"

"Hi think not, sir. Hit won't be till quite late. Will you leave your name, sir?"

"That's quite unnecessary." The stranger hesitated a moment as if reluctant to go, and then, "I will perhaps—call again," he said, and turned away.

Hovey remained standing, looking after him until he had disappeared in the gloom of the evening, and then he closed the door, muttering as he did so,

"Hi 'ad a good look hat 'im. Hi'd know 'im again, sure. Tall an' spare, white 'air, an' wot heyes!"

As the tall man walked away with a quick tread, that was nervous rather than strong, a small figure came out from the shadows across the way, and followed him, never too near, and always near enough, keeping him always in view with the ease of the expert at the work.

It was an easy chase for the shadower, for while the distance traversed was considerable, the old man proceeded after a most erratic fashion, stopping often. The evening was warm, and once he entered a modest café and refreshed himself with an ice, eating it rapidly, and afterwards sitting for a long time seemingly lost in a reverie. At last he rouses himself and goes on again, and still the shadow is close at his heels. As they are crossing a little park, the old man pauses again, looks about him, and seats himself on a bench just within the shadow of some clustering shrubbery. He takes off his hat and rests it upon his knee, holding it there with an elbow, and leaning his chin upon his hand.

"Another halt," thinks the spy, ruefully; and then he, too, selects a bench, a little aloof from the other, yet in full sight, and settles himself to wait.

A half-hour passes, and the old man has hardly stirred; the watcher fumes inwardly, but is constrained to stillness. He must not attract attention to himself, and the little park is tenantless, except for these two. He stretches himself along the hard bench with one arm for a pillow, and this proves his undoing. He has been a long time on guard near the house on the Avenue, and he is tired; but he will not fall asleep, he thinks, not he. How still that old man sits! If he would only move just a little—how warm it is—how—he stifles a yawn, looks, stretches; in spite of himself, closes his eyes, as someone nears him crossing the park, and sleeps.

* * * * * *

When Miles La Croix reaches home it is long past midnight. He lets himself in with a latch-key, pale and weary, all the fire gone out from his deep-set eyes.

A light burns dimly in the vestibule, and some one glides out from the studio, causing him to start.

"Moina!"

"Papa! Is it you at last? How anxious I have been! And how tired you look! You are shivering, too."

"Yes; a little chill—I—I wandered further than I meant."

"Wandered! Papa! You have not been wandering all the evening. Were you not at the meeting?"

"The meeting?" He stared at her vacantly. "The—meeting—we—no—we did not meet."

"Not meet! Why, Mr. Crashaw came for you. He said there was a special meeting. He thought he might overtake you; I told him you had just gone out, and he hurried away. Were you not with him?"

He began to mount the stairs slowly and with evident effort.

"I am going to my own room, Moina. Will you kindly pour me some wine, once I am there? I—I am very tired—*too* tired to talk. I am going to retire at once—at once."

The girl knew this mood; and she followed him silently to his room, poured him his wine, and looked to his comfort as she was used to do whenever she was permitted to serve him, which, since his illness, had not been often. It was useless to question him, she knew. She

bent over him and kissed his cheek, and he wearily returned the caress.

"Good night, papa," she said; "I must send Margot to bed; she is waiting up, poor thing! I'll look in again to see if you are comfortable."

Moina lingered below, filled with an anxiety which was unaccountable even to herself. Where had her father been? and upon what errand? That he had not seen Crashaw she felt sure. It was not like him to go out at evening, and alone; to go, too, as he had done without a word. It was not until she went in search of him, when Crashaw came, that she learned from Margot that he had gone out. It was the first time since his residence in New York that he had gone out like that. He hardly knew the city. The girl sighed heavily as she went back to her father's room.

He was already asleep with his head thrown back upon the pillow, his white hair pushed up as if by a feverish hand. The light from a softly-shaded lamp fell across the thin hands that moved slightly, as if already he had entered dreamland.

She had brought a bowl of cooling drink, and after putting this down, she seated herself by the bedside and looked sadly down upon the wan, changed face.

Sitting there half in shadow, lest he should see her too suddenly, if he chanced to wake, she let the minutes slip by, while sad thoughts and tender memories filled her mind.

Presently the sleeper moved and began to murmur, broken words at first, then intelligible fragments of sentences.

"Another symptom," thought Moina; "he never *used* to talk in his sleep." Then she started and almost held her breath. She had caught one word that roused all her faculties.

"*Sentenced.*" That was the word. She drew further back into the shadow now, and listened deliberately.

"Sentenced—yes—twice! Do you say?—ah!—it must be done—then." His hands were moving now as if writing. "But reason, try reason—first." A long pause, then a profound sigh, "Who? do it—then I will—yes, I go—see him—warn—Lord—and——"

Moina's heart was beating wildly. Suddenly she remembered having heard or read that it was possible to converse with a sleeper who talked thus. She leaned forward and softly uttered the word that he had spoken last.

"Warn?"

"Yes, warn. Once more warn him. After that—I say no more. Only—it must be I—I who do—it."

"It! What?" she breathed.

He did not heed. Some new idea had entered that irresponsible brain. He went through the movements of opening letters, and muttered vaguely, "Ah, here, I must put these on the book—the book, where——"

"The book is here, papa; let me write for you," she said close at his ear.

"Yes, write."

"Write. What shall I write?—read it to me.'

"Sentenced definitely—Acton Peasley, manufacturer—tyrant—employer of four hundred men, women, and children—martyrs."

"Yes."

"Write next, Harlan Seymour, railway magnate."

"Sentenced?" she breathed.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not settled—but soon. The others—never mind the others now—the other—Peasley—he won't be hurt—this time, and the—rest—ah!"

He stopped, and his lips moved silently, as was his waking habit when reading a letter not too plainly written. He lay prone upon his back, and his voice, but for a certain monotone, was so clear and natural, she found it hard to believe him actually sleeping. She sat there for a long time, but there were no more disturbed utterances, and presently he gave a nervous start and awoke.

She arose quickly and took up the cooling drink.

"Here is your sherbert, papa; will you drink it now? I think you have slept a little."

He took the drink and quaffed it thirstily.

"Yes," he said, "I dropped asleep and have been dreaming. That is one of my annoyances since my illness. I dream so *much*. It tires me!"

"Are the dreams unpleasant, papa?"

"I don't know. I think they must be, for sometimes I awake suddenly and with an uncomfortable sensation—an actual distress sometimes. There, my daughter, go away now. Put out the light, and go. I need nothing more."

When Moina was locked in her own room, she sank upon her knees beside her bed, and buried her face in the pillow.

"I have found a way," she murmured, "I have found a way. Heaven help me, and Heaven forgive me! '*Sentenced!*' No wonder my poor father is no longer himself! I must save these men, I *must*, and I must save my father—from crime. Oh, my Heavenly Father, give me help! raise up for me *somewhere* one friend, *just one*, for I am desolate and evil is all about me."

CHAPTER XLV.

A NEW VICTIM.

MRS. MARVIN, Mr. Lord's housekeeper, arose as usual on the morning following the visit of the tall old man, and was not slow to discover that Hovey was not, "as usual," visible and active about his duties. Cook was at work in the pantry, the housemaid was sweeping down the front steps. Mrs. Marvin went with much dignity to the door of her master's room, and, before knocking, listened for any sound within. All was still, and she applied her knuckles to the panel with some asperity. Still no sound. She knocked again, a double knock this time, but with no better success.

Startled, yet emboldened, by this strange silence, she put her hand upon the door-knob, hesitated, then tried the door. To her surprise it opened at her touch.

Opened and swung wide, as the hand released the knob, and the next moment Mrs. Marvin was running wildly down the stairs.

"I don't know to this day how I managed," she used to say afterwards, "but I *managed* to get that girl off for a policeman, and for Mr. Follingsbee without a panic. 'If anything goes wrong send at once for Mr. Follingsbee.' These were Mr. Lord's very words, and I MANAGED to do my duty."

Having done her duty, very little remained of Mrs. Marvin but a mass of nerves and confused utterances.

Mr. Follingsbee, who lived close by, was promptly at hand, and the housemaid, panting and perspiring, soon marshalled in two policemen.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Follingsbee and the foremost of the officers in a breath.

Mrs. Marvin gasping, and on the verge of hysterics, reclined upon one of the high-backed vestibule chairs, supported by the cook, who had been repeating over and over the same question. She lifted her face as they approached and pointing upward, gasped—

"Hovey—*dead*—killed!—go up!"

Instantly, Follingsbee, who knew all of Mr. Lord's plans and arrangements, led the way upstairs.

The door of the chamber stood wide open, as Mrs. Marvin had left it in her flight, and upon the threshold Mr. Follingsbee paused, horror-stricken.

No need to enter to see that death was there. Hovey was lying upon his back, his face turned away, his arms thrown out as if there had been one moment of struggle, then instant surrender. His breast, and the bed about his body, was red with his life blood, and the shining handle of a dagger still in the wound, showed where the assassin had struck home.

"Suicide," suggested one of the policemen, pressing forward, and bending over the corpse.

But Mr. Follingsbee was clearer sighted. "Murder," he said, and he put his hand upon that of the dead man. "Cold," he added; "been dead for hours." Then he turned to the officers of the law." "Mr. Lord left me in charge here," he said. "In case of any unforeseen event, I was empowered to act for him. Heaven knows, this is unforeseen! You understand—that is why the housekeeper sent at once for me."

The two men nodded.

"I shall take full charge here. In the first place, will one of you mount guard at the door; we must keep out the curious. I shall send at once for a detective and the coroner."

The two policemen nodded again, and exchanged glances of approval; evidently this prompt, direct method had won their admiration.

"I shall also send for Madeline Payne," said Mr. Follingsbee, *sotto voce*, as he began to look about the room.

Everything was in order. Not an article of furniture out of place. Evidently there had been no struggle. There was no horror on the dead face. No look of terror or surprise. The assassin must have

crept upon a sleeping victim, entering without noise; and *how* had he entered?

Turning the frightened but curious women out of the room of death, Mr. Follingsbee and the officer, who had remained with him, went below, and began a tour of the basement floor. Doors and windows seemed intact. The policeman tried them one after another.

"Must have had skeleton keys," he said.

"Nonsense, man. Don't you see that every door has strong double inner bolts, every window a burglar alarm, all set and in good order? Let us go to the rear."

At the back of the house a small hall, with a solid well-barred door, opened upon the rear yard. On each side of the door was a narrow slit of window, which Mr. Lord, immediately after the visit of the man of the dagger and the letter, had protected thoroughly with a network of light iron bars upon the *inside*. The transom above was similarly guarded, but the bars here were further apart, and set in a light frame, which moved upon hinges opening inward, so that the transom, in its turn, might open to admit air during the heated days.

"Ah," cried the officer, "here we have it." He pointed to the door. The key was turned, the bolt drawn.

He opened the door and looked out, drawing back instantly at a word from Mr. Follingsbee.

"Look there," said that gentleman, pointing upward. The framework of iron was swinging loosely, and half of the single frame of glass that had filled the transom was gone.

"That's it," said the officer; "there's a boy in the business, and must be a mighty *small* one, too. The piece of glass is just outside."

Mr. Follingsbee turned away. "Let's go back," he said, "and leave the rest to the detective when he comes."

"We might question the women," suggested the officer, who seemed not much inclined to enact the rôle of detective himself.

"No," objected Mr. Follingsbee, "they will get their evidence mixed enough without too many questioners; besides, one of them, perhaps, has neglected to close that transom screen. If we put her on her guard, she will deny it probably. The murderer came in through this door; we will wait for the details."

* * * * * *

It was understood between Madeline and Drexel that he was not to see her at her hotel, where he would sometimes, of necessity, pay a visit to the Princess Sacha Orloff. They were to communicate by letter when necessary, and, if a meeting seemed best, they would meet upon safe and neutral ground, in Olive Girard's cosy library.

Early as was the hour, Madeline was preparing to go out when the messenger arrived with a note from Mr. Follingsbee. She tore it open eagerly, and read—

"MISS PAYNE,—Hovey has been murdered in his bed. According to my understanding with Mr. Lord, you are in his confidence, and may, perhaps, be of assistance in our investigation. Come at once, if possible. Do you know where to find Hurst? If so, send for him.

"FOLLINGSBEE."

"Horrible," exclaimed the girl, and then almost in the same breath, "How fortunate."

The first word was for poor Hovey, the last for herself. She had made a discovery, and had sent a note to Drexel the evening before, asking him to meet her that morning *early* at Olive's; she had received a prompt reply. She knew she should find him there, and, flushed with excitement, she thrust the letter in her pocket and hastened to the rendezvous.

Drexel was there before her, and waiting impatiently. He had heard the horrible news, having arrived just as Dr. Vaughan was setting out for the house on Fifth Avenue.

"Let us go at once," he said, "my carriage is just around the corner; we can talk on the way."

When they were seated in the carriage, Madeline turned toward him a troubled face.

"This is growing terrible," she said. "That seems a fated house. Do you know any of the particulars?"

"No, only that Hovey has been murdered."

"I am so anxious! I have had such a horrible thought."

"What is it?"

"Did you know that Mr. Lord put Hovey in his own rooms to sleep?"

Drexel started. "Good heavens! no!" he said.

"Could he have been killed in that room? the thought will not leave me that——" she paused and they looked at each other with shocked faces. Then she said,

"Can you investigate there without arousing suspicion, or making yourself known to Mr. Follingsbee as Hurst?"

"Follingsbee will have to know sooner or later, but I have arranged for that. I have sent to Captain B—— for a man who will *seem* to conduct the business, I working with him. The captain will send the right man, be sure."

She drew Mr. Follingsbee's letter from her pocket and gave it to him, "You see they want Mr. Hurst," she said.

"Be easy, they shall not have cause to complain. But it is well that you sent for me, and it was by the merest chance that I got your note. You have made some discoveries, I suppose? After I have satisfied myself about this murder, we must find time for a few words in the library. It may be our last interview for many days, can you manage it?"

"Yes. You are going away, then."

He smiled oddly. "I am going into the lion's den," he replied. Then suddenly he asked, "How happens Vaughan to be at hand?"

Madeline blushed at the sudden mention of Dr. Vaughan's name. "You know he comes up twice a week," she said, "to look after his own affairs. He chanced to come yesterday, and was going back this morning."

"He will have sorry news to carry back to Mr. Lord."

"Yes, I suppose he must know it."

"He must, of course, and if it is as we fear, it will complicate matters for *us*."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TWIN DAGGERS.

DR. VAUGHAN'S examination left no doubt as to the murder. Hovey was slain in his sleep, struck once, struggled once, and that was all. Even that one struggle must have been spasmodic. Only the nerves felt the blow, and responded to it, it was never recognized by the brain, and on the face still rested the relaxed placid look of the sleeper.

The three women, housekeeper, cook, and maid, slept on the third floor, and had not heard a sound during the night. That the rear door was locked and barred, Mrs. Marvin was certain. As to the transom-guard she was not so sure, Hovey was the one to look after those things. If he had omitted this duty last night, he had been horribly punished for the slight omission. Certainly, if the iron guard had been closed, the assassin could not have entered, or so it seemed.

Evidently the burglar and assassin was no novice, no weakling. It was a strong, steady, practised hand that struck that blow, and he had left no trace of himself.

Nothing had been stolen, robbery was not the object; what, then, could it have been? Hovey was almost a stranger in America. He had been heard to say that he had neither friends nor relatives here, and only some distant cousins whom he hardly knew, in England. He seldom went out, and received no visitors.

When Drexel and Madeline entered the room where the dead man lay, Dr. Vaughan was standing opposite them beside the bed, and lifting his eyes to Madeline's face, he saw her start and turn so white that he feared she was about to faint, but she controlled herself, clenching her hands and biting her underlip. At the same instant a sharp exclamation broke from Drexel, and the two turned and faced each other. He, too, was pale, and the look they exchanged lingered long in Dr. Vaughan's memory, haunting and tormenting him.

Not a word was spoken, and after one more long look, Madeline turned and went dizzily from the room, to shut herself up alone in the library.

An hour passed, and then Drexel came quietly in, and again for a moment the two faced each other in silence, then Drexel said gravely,

"Elias Lord certainly bears a charmed life."

"You mean," she said, "that his life is the price of poor Hovey's? Oh, what a fatality."

"Yes, it is horrible, it could not well be worse. As I live, Miss Payne, I believe that two innocent, honest men have been sacrificed in the attempt to reach Mr. Lord."

"Two!"

"Yes; you do not understand me, and I cannot go into details, but, do you remember the old man who was assassinated last fall, as he was returning from church?"

"Yes."

"That murder seemed like *this*, without motive. It was clearly proved at the trial that the murderer did not even *know* his victim.

Jacob Traill might be alive to-day, *if he had not borne a fatal resemblance to Mr. Lord.*"

"Good heavens!"

"And I believe Hovey would be alive, too, if he had not slept last night, *in Elias Lord's bed.*"

"Oh, this is too horrible, something *must be done.*"

"Something shall be done," he said grimly, "and at once. We dare not dally now, it is time for extreme measures." He drew a chair forward, "sit down and let us talk as fast as possible. There must be no more vicarious slaying of Mr. Lord, and unless these villains are stopped and rendered harmless, there will be other deeds like this I verily believe. I fear we cannot keep *this* matter out of the newspapers. When it is known that Elias Lord's footman has been murdered in Elias Lord's chamber, the terrorists will know that they have missed, for the third time, the man they evidently intended to make a terrible example of. And that knife."

"Ah, that knife!" sighed Madeline. "It is like, it is *precisely* like the one I have, the one left in the head of Mr. Lord's bed——"

"Of course! perhaps it was left by the same hand. At any rate, it is the *fac-simile* of the other and for a good reason; that is the knife used by the executioners of a certain brotherhood. In Europe it would be recognized as the knife used by the communist, the nihilists, of organised murder by many a name. In Europe more than one poor victim has been found with that knife sticking in his heart. We have not got so well acquainted with it here, as yet. But it will come, surely and soon, unless the tide of coming revolutions from every corner of the universe is stopped, unless a strong hand puts down these leagues, and brotherhoods, and *bands*, that are to the trades unions of years ago as is the jungle panther to the pastured lamb. But to come back to the knife, possibly, even as it is, some investigating reporter may see in this murder the method of the 'Avenger,' may scent the truth."

"One moment," she broke in, "is it not *best* that the truth be made public? Oh, I know Mr. Lord would not wish it. I can see, too, that it may make difficulties for you. But if such danger lurks all around us—if, as is more than probable, others are menaced, they may be attacked. Indeed, Mr. Lord told me when he received that first warning letter, that two others had received similar ones!"

"I remember."

"To make all the truth known now would be to solemnly warn all who have any reason to fear these murderers."

"Wait. I agree with you, and yet before this can be done Mr. Lord must be consulted. He is out of harm's way now, but do you not know him better than to think that he will stay in hiding, for it amounts to that, if the truth be known? He will come back and face the danger, or he would not be Elias Lord."

"You are right," she said.

"We must consider this step well, you see. And, first of all, Dr. Vaughan must be the one to bear this news. Before I go I will put into your hands a letter for Mr. Lord from *Hurst.* You will give this letter to Vaughan, and ask him to deliver it. Mr. Lord's reply will

come to you. I hope he may be persuaded not to come back. Of course, the city detectives must be allowed to take up this case and manage it in their own way."

"And you?"

"Be sure I shall not be idle. My plans, as you know, were already laid. This latest outrage decides me to make the plunge at once. It is a bold step, but I must trust to it. It is not enough to suspect these men, I must *know*—I must have *proof*. And if we would prevent further disaster, no time must be lost. I will tell you just how we stand at present. But, first, you sent for me. Tell me why?"

She looked at him with a shade of wistfulness. "Do you still doubt Moina La Croix?" she asked.

To her surprise he flushed and dropped his eyes.

"You know that Mr. Lord left clear instructions regarding all home matters. And, with a view to the possibility of another anonymous letter, or, perhaps, another explosive being left at his door, he arranged that a[illegible] letter left by a messenger, or that did not bear upon its face evidence of respectability, should be handed to *me*, to be opened at discretion. Shortly before he left town a letter came, and Mrs. Marvin, through some chance, received it at the door. Not understanding the instructions about such matters, or in a fit of absent-mindedness, she brought the letter into the library here, and left it among a mass of journals and pamphlets there on the table. It was not until after Mr. Lord had gone, and while I was taking a last look about the house before going to the 'Oriental,' that I came upon this letter. I saw at once that it was directed in a woman's hand, it even struck me as being a disguised hand. It was not the hand that had written the warning letters, of that I felt sure. Of course, I sent it at once to Mr. Lord. I did not feel justified in opening it. He must have received the letter some days ago. Possibly he, in his turn, mislaid it, or, perhaps, he hesitated before sending it back. At any rate, I have just received it. It is a note of warning."

"Another?"

"Yes, and from Moina La Croix." She put the letter into his hand. "As you will see, there is little or no attempt to disguise the writing of the letter; but the address upon the envelope is reversed. I have received several notes from Moina. You will find two of them with the letter, that you may verify for yourself."

He examined the letter of warning and the two notes attentively.

"How do you account for this half-disguise?" he asked.

"I had written to her that I was on the point of leaving Mr. Lord's house. Of course, she could not dream that I would see the letter, but, after writing it, second thought had suggested that I might still be here, that, by chance, I *might* see the outside of the letter. Hence the disguised address."

"Do you know how the letter came?"

"No; Mrs. Marvin could not or would not remember."

"This letter is a strong indication. I may keep it, of course."

"Of course."

"And how do you get on with the Princess?"

"Better than I had dared to hope. The two women are very much alone. They accepted me in good faith. They actually court my acquaintance. I have jumped to one conclusion."

"Ah! and that?"

"Simply that the elder lady is not the mother of the younger."

Drexel smiled and held his peace.

"The respectful tenderness of each toward the other is too marked. They have not always stood toward each other in the same position as at present."

"You are very astute," he said.

"I am likely to find my new companion something more than a figure-head, after all," she went on. "Madam Orloff's maid and mine are already confidants, and my maid in turn confides in my companion. Yesterday, through this source, I learned something which may interest you."

"Pray relate it."

"The elder lady is very melancholy. She tries to seem cheerful when with the younger, but she weeps much in secret. And she kisses and cries over a picture which she hastily conceals from her so-called daughter, showing much fear and anxiety lest it be discovered."

Drexel started, and an eager look came into his face. "In some way I must manage to see that picture," he said. "Thank you, Miss Payne, that item may be worth more than you think. Is there anything more?"

"Nothing."

"Then hear my report. First, as to our flower-carrier. The boy, Frank Price, is still very ill; indeed, he knows no one and lies in a half-stupor. I have talked privately with the surgeons, and they have examined very closely. They decide that the wound upon the head could not have been caused by a waggon-pole, from its size and shape. Nor was it the work of a horse's hoof. It is, they declare, just such a blow as might have been inflicted by *a heavy and knotted cane*."

"Ah, horrible!"

"The boy who was with him at the street corner has not yet been discovered, neither has the old Jew. As for Mr. Savorin, I have a shrewd detective lodged in the same house with him. He seems decidedly a young fellow of very gentlemanly habits. He lives regularly, has few associates, and his part in the programme seems to be that of a lecturer of, and to, the better class of socialists."

"He had a frank face."

"True, he has, and I fancy he may wake up some morning to find himself a dupe, rather than a co-conspirator. However, he is, I believe, one of the foreign band sent here by the authority of leaders abroad—dangerous men. He is in communication with the leaders. They are very guarded, but if Savorin can help us, be sure that no movement of his will escape my detective."

Madeline sighed.

"For more than two weeks," he went on, "I have lost sight of the butternut-coloured spy. And the Englishman is a baffling personage.

I do not yet know where his local habitation may be, for the reason that he seems perpetually to shift about. He has an aid, a factotum, who is movable like himself, and there is another man, if not *two*, whom I have not even seen. And now prepare to smile. For more than two weeks I have occupied, more or less, a room just opposite the house of Miles La Croix. My windows command its front. I have a strong glass and all the appliances of a detective's camera."

"Oh!" Madeline's face betrayed her keen interest.

"I pass for a reporter," he went on, "and can come and go at all times unchallenged. I have seen Miss La Croix at the door and at the windows often. I have used my glass remorselessly. I know that she has been deeply troubled, that she suffers. Mr. La Croix has been very ill. They have had a trained nurse there. And this Rene Savorin was there constantly for almost two weeks. The Englishman paid one visit, and only one, during Mr. La Croix's illness; after that his factotum called daily at the door for news. I have made the doctor's acquaintance. I have even stopped at the door and chatted with the little Swiss maid."

"But was that safe? Might they not recognize you?"

He laughed, and put a hand up to his face.

"See what I have sacrificed in the cause." He drew away his hand, and with it came beard and false moustache. Madeline sat aghast at the transformation. The fine strong face, as smooth as a girl's, was very handsome, but very unlike the moustached and bearded Roger Drexel she had known. The false beard was the *facsimile* of that he had worn for years. Seeing him wear it, no one could have guessed the truth.

"You are the first to see me as I am," he said, replacing the beard. "I live now, for the most part, in disguise. And now—perhaps I can tell you how that letter was left at the door."

"Ah, I wish you could."

"Listen. Since the day after the explosion here, I have had this house watched continually. A very bright lad, especially trained for his work, has been on guard here every day and late into the night, only relieved when necessary by another almost as able. This was done in the hope of detecting some messenger of the enemy in the act of leaving another warning or of finding again our spy. Unfortunately, it was the front only that was under Toole's eye. I dare say our assassin has prowled more than one night through the alleys, and so reached the rear door. Probably he has hung about here for many nights, waiting for what is likely to come in any house, sooner or later—an hour of relaxed vigilance, when some door or window will be forgotten, and the assassin furnished an entrance."

"Poor Hovey," sighed Madeline, "he has been so faithful, and to think that his first forgetful act or omission should cost him his life!"

"Yes, it furnishes matter for a sermon. But about Toole. Through him I have been pretty well informed as regards the comers and goers here. One day, early in the morning, I followed Miss La Croix and her maid to within a few blocks of this house. It was during

her father's illness, and I knew that something urgent must be the cause of her early promenade. At a corner they separated, and the maid hurried away, while Miss La Croix sauntered slowly about until she came back. I chose to remain and look after the young lady—at a distance and unseen, of course. The maid's mission I learnt from Toole, who described her minutely. She came here, rang the bell, gave someone who opened to her a letter, and hurried away. The someone was probably Mrs. Marvin."

"Yes."

"And the letter, this one I hold in my hand. The dates correspond. But I must get on. Last night Toole had an adventure. At about nine o'clock, a tall old man, whom from his description I recognized at once as Mr. La Croix, rang at the door and, it being dark, Toole was near enough to see that Hovey answered the ring. There was a moment's parley, and then the tall man went away, followed by Toole. Mr. La Croix made slow and somewhat erratic progress, halting finally to rest in a little park which lay in his homeward route. The boy had been on guard all day, and was tired. Mr. La Croix sat a long time, and the boy, being obliged to keep very still in order not to be discovered, found the situation too much for him. He fell asleep."

"Ah, how unfortunate!"

"Well—yes. When he awoke, the old man had vanished, and after running about frantically in the hope of recovering his lost trail, Toole went back to his post. It was nearly midnight, and past the time for his relief. We won't stop for details. Toole, upon getting back, saw in the shadow what he at first took for his substitute guard. But a nearer approach undeceived him. It was Miles La Croix returned, heaven only knows for what reason. He hung about for some time, walking to and fro opposite the house. Then he set off a second time, and you may be sure Toole did not lose him again. I had been off duty, or rather *on duty* in another quarter of the city, and was loitering in the street not far from my own doorway watching the movements across the way, where, although it was past midnight, Miss La Croix was up and moving about restlessly, as I could tell by the shifting lights in her room and the shadows upon the curtains, first in her own rooms and then below. While thus occupied, I saw the return of Mr. La Croix, slowly followed by Toole, and was not slow in getting the latter up into my room, where I heard the whole story."

"And do you think—can it be——" She stopped, unwilling to utter her thought.

"That La Croix entered here, and killed Hovey? I am not prepared to say that. He may have a guilty knowledge of the affair; but he was alone, and the murderer never entered this house by the rear door without the assistance of a lad small enough to crawl through that narrow transom. Besides, Mr. La Croix has lately risen from a sick bed; he is an old man. I doubt if he could have the nerve or the strength to strike such a blow. One thing is certain, we must keep *that* knowledge to ourselves for the present. I intend to make a personal investigation."

"Poor Moina La Croix!" said Madeline Payne. "She may be

a revolutionist, or she may not ; all the same, she has a heavy burden to carry. She may be a victim rather than a plotter. This letter looks like it. I pity her, I pity her."

"And so do I," said Drexel. "If she *is* innocent, she shall be vindicated, be sure of that."

A carriage drew up at the side entrance just beyond the library window. Drexel looked out, and then arose.

"The coroner has come," he said, "and—yes, Captain B—— is with him. Now all can be arranged as I wish."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A COUNCIL OF THREE.

"*From Paris, France.*

"To ROGER DREXEL, ESQ.

"MY DEAR SIR,—After some delay I am able to send you the information asked for—the greater part of it, at least. The documents herewith enclosed, copies of reports from various sources, will, I hope, supply you with the desired information concerning the socialist, La Croix, as well as the various leaders of the higher circles in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. The report from Italy is not so full as I could have wished ; still, I hope it may serve. As for the 'difficulty' you mention, I have encountered none. We keep a closer *surveillance* over our revolutionists here in Europe than do you Americans, and our records are very complete.

"I think you will hear from my brother in St. Petersburg promptly, and you may rely upon his using all the means at his command in his effort to serve one who has rendered such inestimable service to his unworthy brother in times past.

"An important matter brought Ferrars, of London fame, to this city to confer with me, and from him I have this item : The leader local to London is one Sharlaw, an idealist ; a strange man, with some very good points, 'tis said. I do not think the man Crashaw has figured in Paris ; but Ferrars tells me that Crashaw, the great ironmaster, is still king of his forges somewhere in the heart of England, a long way from London. He is sure that Crashaw, the ironmaster, never dabbled in revolution, and thinks there must be an impostor somewhere.

"Apropos of all this, one *Dr. Lugos*, who was conspicuous here for a time, is missing from Paris. He would hardly be safer in London than here, and is thought to be in America or Australia. He is a Russian, but calls himself a Pole—big, strong, swarthy, with a rather imposing presence. Should he chance to be one of your American coterie, you have to deal with a dangerous man. *He stops at nothing.*

"Once more let me repeat how glad I am to have been able to do you this small service. May it not prove *quite* worthless, and hold me always your debtor to command, "J. A. BOLOGSY."

"*From St. Petersburg.*

"M. ROGER DREXEL,

"SIR,—At the request of my brother, J. A. Bologsy, of the Paris detectives, I have made haste to gather for you fuller details, concerning the Prince and Princess Orloff and others, than were contained in my first report to you; and this time, I think, we have exhausted our resources. Hoping you may find the enclosed notes sufficient to serve your purpose, I am, my dear sir, your obedient servant, "RAOUL BOLOGSY."

* * * * * * *

"MY DEAR MR. HURST,—I have reached the desired point, and find Madam La Princess more than willing to drive with me—quite at my disposal, indeed. I await your instructions. "M. P."

These three letters Roger Drexel read one after the other, sitting alone, long after midnight, in his down-town den.

The first, with its accompanying documentary evidence, seemed quite to his liking. He smiled over some of the reports, and murmured as he laid them aside,

"I think they will carry me through. Heavens! what a wonderful system those Frenchmen have! If only ours were as complete and as rigid!"

The second letter he laid aside without more than a glance at the "notes" enclosed.

"That must wait a little," he said. "One thing at a time."

After reading Madeline's brief note, he took up his pen and wrote:

"MY KIND HELPER,—I shall see Madam La Princess to-morrow at two p.m. Will you kindly engage her company for the *next* hour? Have her out of the hotel by half-past three, and keep her safely away for at least an hour—longer if convenient. Yours gratefully,

"HURST."

"That must go as early as possible," he said to himself; and then for a moment was lost in thought evidently too serious to be called reverie. As a result of this thinking he penned another letter.

"MY DEAR HOSMER,—Glad to hear that you are almost 'as good as new' once more. Those rascally Huns did you mischief enough, and got off too easy. Since you seem as ready for the fray as ever, I will give you another commission, if only to keep you out of mischief. I have got on amazingly with your friend the worker in wood, and you were right in your surmise. There *is* some fact in connection with his second advent into the 'Union' that is a sore spot to him. He *had* a reason for urging you *not to join*. It may be worth our while to learn what it was. Another thing: he has a dread of another strike, and is full of apprehension. His anxiety is almost greater than the cause he ascribes it to. I wish you would look him up and keep track of him. Don't pump him, or seem over-anxious; only keep him in *evidence*, in case of need. He lives at No. 79, Short Street, a very humble cottage, in an humble locality, and his name is Joseph Parker.

You won't be likely to see me for some days. Don't be too conspicuous at Olim's, and don't neglect Parker. Yours in good faith,

"ROGER."

When this was finished, he lighted a cigar and settled himself in a more comfortable chair, like one who intends to make a long sitting.

"I shall hardly see my bed to-night," he said, pulling the foreign letters toward him and taking up the first paper contained in the Paris reports. "No sleep for me until I have mastered all these. I am entering a labyrinth with even less of a clue than was Ariadne's thread."

* * * * * *

While Roger Drexel was thus occupied, a group of three men, sitting about a round table in a small room not far away, were, like him, "perverting the uses of the night."

The first of these was Rufus Crashaw; the second, seated opposite, his shadow, Passauf; and the third, a large man with a decidedly military air. One looked, almost instinctively, for some frog, stripe, or shoulder-strap that should distinguish him from the mere civilian. He wore an immense moustache and huge side whiskers; his eyes were dark, keen, and set under burly brows; his large white hands were clasped upon the table before him, and his face, expressive of nothing save cold attention, was turned toward Jules Passauf, who held in his hand a copy of an evening paper. He had just been reading aloud a hastily-written and somewhat garbled account of the murder of the night before.

"It's unfortunate," he said, after a moment of silence, "unfortunate altogether. And yet—is anyone to blame?"

"To blame—well, that's as you think. We ought to have been better informed. To think that the man has been out of the city nearly two weeks!" This from Crashaw.

"You forget," interposed Passauf in his monotonous voice. "It was not safe to reconnoitre overmuch since the explosion. There is every reason to suppose that the house would be watched—outside and in."

"In my opinion," said the first speaker, "there has been unusual cunning displayed from the first. If Mr. Lord left his fine mansion so quietly that no one was aware of it outside of his immediate household, and if the fact of his absence has remained unknown for two weeks, it is because there was a deliberate plan to hoodwink—some one."

"Well," growled Crashaw, "it succeeded."

"Yes; it succeeded. Now, let me call your attention to two or three facts. Although that paper speaks at least three times of the man's absence, 'on account of his health,' it does not once name, nor so much as hint at, his locality. Although the man Hovey—is not that the name?—was killed sleeping in his master's bed, and it's rather unusual for servants to occupy the apartments of their masters, no mention is made of the fact."

Passauf glanced down at the paper.

"True," he said; "it says, 'Struck while asleep,' and 'assassinated in his bed.'"

"Even so. Then, although the weapon was unusual enough to be worthy of comment, it is merely spoken of as 'a knife,' or 'the deadly weapon,' and they are careful not to so much as hint at a motive, possible or probable."

"Well," said Crashaw curtly, "what do you make out of all this?"

"Simply that we have some one other than the man Lord to deal with. This person does not play with his cards on the table, any more than ourselves; ergo, we will do well to be on our guard."

"Bah!" said Crashaw. "*We* are beyond reach. In any case, even if——"

"Even if our agent *is* discovered, which is not very likely to happen. Don't be too confident. The man Lord has had repeated warnings, not to mention being nearly blown up. Rest assured the mind that framed this non-committal report of last night's affair sees the truth of it—knows that knife was not meant for the servant, but for the master. To trace the instigators, with all the data they must have, to *us*—that is, to the leaders of the revolutionists, is but a step. And they——"

"There is but *one* leader," said Crashaw, with a sardonic grin, "and it is neither you nor I nor Passauf here."

"Crashaw, don't flatter yourself. You are a capital diplomatist; but—I shall not rest until I know who is looking into this thing. If it is the city police, I shall not be so anxious. We know their methods. If it should be—say—a private detective——"

"Well?"

"I should make it the object of my life to identify him," said the military man, with a sardonic smile.

"And then would apply to the Patriarch for a *letter du cachet*, eh?" said Crashaw. Then, changing his tone, "What is to be done?"

"First of all, all efforts in that direction must cease for the present. Everything has failed. We had counted upon a grand effect, a revelation that should strike terror to the heart of every man who has enlisted with this greedy money-king. Instead of that guarded statement we hoped for something different."

"Like this, for example," said Crashaw. "'*First blow of the Revolutionists—a money-king laid low.*—The dagger of the Central Committee does its work.—Having been repeatedly warned,' etc., etc. Something like that, eh!"

"Yes, something like that; something that will teach these money-kings to fear us; something to show our men of the ranks how long-armed we can be upon occasion."

"If they were Europeans," said Passauf, "they would not need to be taught that."

"Well, Lugos," said Crashaw again, "what's to be done? Come, now!"

"First, and I take that into my own hands, we must know who is working against us."

"You mean, what detectives?"

"Precisely. Next, no further effort must be made at present to reach this man with forty lives. There must not even be a spy allowed near the premises."

"We might send the agent abroad."

"The agent's *alibi* is perfect. Besides, we may have need of him here."

"Then all of our plans must go for nothing. We must simply begin over again. The shock that was to lead up to our grand *coup* is yet to be felt and heard. And when shall we look for the next—opening, pray?"

"In your 'Patriarch's' famous domesday book, I should say. We can easily fix upon the next—target. Do you think that the other schemes are progressing as we could wish?"

"Decidedly yes. When the game begins it will run its course. Oh, we shall make an impression! Don't doubt it; many are eager, volunteers will not be lacking."

"Many are already impatient," said Passauf.

"And how does your Mr. La Croix?" asked Lugos. "Is he still all that you could wish?"

Crashaw threw back his head and indulged in a silent chuckle.

"When I think of that night," he said; "of the difficulty I had in bringing you together——"

"Say, rather of bringing *him*——"

"Well, that *is* nearer it. Of bringing him into your presence, then, even after he knew that the Central Committee had appointed you one of us—and all because he had heard of your 'works' abroad; when I remember how he opposed all 'violence'; when I think of his words, 'Property must sometimes, I fear, be sacrificed. But *life* is sacred. Extreme measures would kill our cause *here*'—I smile."

"Your memory is good, Crashaw."

"I could not forget *that!* Why, when Passauf and I accompanied him home, after that long and fiery harangue of yours, I thought the old man was preparing to declare himself out of the game. He was excited beyond anything I ever saw. We held up your arguments to the last; but left him none the wiser. He would commit himself to nothing, and forbade—*forbade* us, mind you—to act in any way without his orders." Again that silent chuckle. "Then came his sickness and his wonderful transformation. Doctor, you are a man of science; *how* do you explain it?"

"These sudden and entire moral revolutions happen oftener than is supposed," said Lugos. "The man's mental balance was at best not of the strongest. He is old, and in ill health. His enthusiasm for 'the cause' drew him one way, while his 'humanity' and nice scruples pulled another. Our lively argument wrought upon him strangely. He went away greatly excited. The brain was overwrought; fever ensued. What is called *conscience* is killed in many ways. The man of scruples, the idealist, succumbed with the fever. In his place arose a fanatic, a man of one idea. The grey matter of the brain had undergone a change."

"A change, indeed! Where once we had to deal with the 'idealist,' we have now a 'Chief' after my own heart. We have only to suggest, and he adopts the idea as his own, and issues his orders. Life and property are as one to him *now*. Eh, Passauf?"

Passauf nodded.

"Look out!" cautioned Dr. Lugos. "In his condition most things must be, as you say, suggested. He will not be apt to originate much in the way of ideas. But, beware, if he once seizes upon some notion, from another source, and in opposition to your wishes. There will be no obstinacy like his, then."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FERNAND MAKOFSKI, LATE OF IRKUTSK.

THE La Croix, father and daughter, were at breakfast.

It was a quiet meal, for the father was very silent now when alone with his daughter, usually preoccupied in manner, sometimes tacitturn as well. Formerly he had been willing and ready to talk upon general topics, and to talk well, becoming reserved only when *the* topic of the great cause was approached. Now he cared to converse upon no other subject, dismissing "generalities" with scant ceremony, or ignoring them altogether.

Now, if Moina had chosen to press her questions, as once she would have done, he would have been much more communicative than before his illness. But she was no longer in love with revolution. It had become in her eyes an ugly monster, menacing herself and all that she loved.

In these unhappy days her manner, when her father's eye was upon her, was dutiful and full of respectful tenderness, the manner of a loving anxious woman schooled to self-control. There was no more girlish laughter and jesting, no fanciful flights of talk, no light and cheery badinage; and, as one indication of the strange change in him, he never noticed this change in her, any more than he saw the wistfulness, the watchful anxiety, which she could not always keep out of her face.

She was bearing herself bravely, this fair young girl, taught self-restraint in so strange a school. But she was no longer at heart the Moina who had rejoiced in the world and its pleasures only a few weeks ago, and found cause for happiness in her first dinner dress.

The meal was almost finished, when Margot entered and laid a card beside her master's plate.

He took it up and read thereon—

"FERNAND MAKOFSKI,"

underneath this name was pencilled these words, "*Late of Irkutsk.*"

He started at sight of the name, frowned, and seemed trying to remember something.

"Fernand Makofski," he repeated slowly aloud. And then, after another moment of reflection, he said, "show him here, Margot." He did not glance at Moina, he seemed to have forgotten her presence. A month ago she would have left the room, or asked his leave to stay. Now, she did neither, she remained in her place silent, and seemingly as absent as himself.

Fernand Makofski was a man of goodly proportions, well dressed and not ill-looking; his hair, to be sure, was dangerously near to that

shade commonly called red, and his short bristling beard and bushy moustache was only a shade paler. He advanced easily, bowing low to Moina, and said in excellent and but slightly accented English,

"I had hoped my name might be familiar, sir. Although I personally am strange, the name of Miles La Croix has been known and honoured by me for years."

"Your name haunts me," said his host. "It almost seems that I have known you. But—you must pardon me—I am an old man and have been ill, very ill, and—Irkutsk—you say?—I have never been in Irkutsk."

"Then I congratulate you," said the other, bitterly. "Irkutsk has no pleasant memories for a political prisoner."

"Ha!—what is that? A political—you—you are not—are you that Makofski, that officer, who was imprisoned?——" he stopped as if at a loss.

"That Fernand Makofski, who was arrested and condemned as a revolutionist, soon after the assassination of the Tsar, and who am as innocent of participation in that deed as yourself, sir? Yes, I am that man."

Instantly Miles La Croix's hand was extended.

"You are very welcome here, sir," he said with a cordiality that surprised Moina. And, then, for the first time, he seemed to remember her. "Allow me to present my daughter," he said, graciously, "she is as much a friend to the good cause as I myself. You can speak freely before *her*, sir. Pray be seated, and tell us how you chance to be in America."

The visitor seated himself, and after seeming to hesitate a moment, he said,

"I will be perfectly frank with *you*, sir. Of course, you must know that I am a refugee——"

"What—you have escaped? I thought——"

"You thought, no doubt, that I had served out my sentence. I was arrested, as you may remember, in March, of the year '81, and was sentenced for ten years. Four years I passed in penal servitude in the mines of Kara, then I was brought to Irkutsk, where I had been almost three years, then I learned that I was to be transferred to some point in Eastern Siberia, to serve in some capacity with a party of forced colonists. Then I determined to escape at all hazards. I had been kept up thus far by the belief that my case would be agitated by certain of my friends, and that I would be released. But this last was too much. Almost another year was consumed in planning and being baffled. But at last I did escape. You will pardon me if I do not go into details, as you may guess I did not escape unaided, and the secrets of others I am bound to respect. May I ask, sir, if you were in St. Petersburg at the time of my arrest?"

La Croix looked toward Moina, his memory seemed to fail him.

"In 1881, papa," she said, "we were in Berlin."

"Ah! yes, yes! So we were, my daughter." Then he turned an animated face toward his guest again. "And now?—now have you

come to America to help the good cause here? How did you find me—at once?"

"Pardon. Let me explain. I would not mislead you in the least particular. I came here for my own safety. For some reason, unknown to me, I am regarded as a dangerous man, by the agents of the Tsar. When I succeeded in reaching Paris, I naturally thought myself safe; but, no, I have been pursued, and my life assailed, by the secret police agents of Russia, and for my friends' sake, who had done so much to secure me freedom, I at last consented to come to America."

"Persecution!" exclaimed La Croix, excitedly.

"As to my finding you at once, I have been in New York for—some days. I obtained your address from a friend whom I must not name, and who had it from one no doubt well known to you—Sharlaw."

"Ah!"

"I dared not present myself here," he went on; "rather, I had not the right to do it, until I had taken time to assure myself that I had not been followed. I did not care to bring a spy to your door."

"And you think you have escaped them?"

"Thus far—yes. But I must add that I fear I shall soon be a hunted man again. I learned that a person has arrived in America, who is, I am sure, a Russian agent, and a dangerous one. Heretofore, I have lived at a good hotel. It has been a pleasure to me to mingle with my fellows upon an equality, to have the refinements of life about me once more." He glanced at Moina, as if for sympathy in this sentiment.

"It must be, indeed," she murmured.

"But now," he went on, "I must seek a more retired habitation. I must change my habits; I must become, to some extent, a prisoner again. I intend to make this change at once, and this is why I ventured to come here this morning, while it is yet safe to do so, and before I go into hiding."

"Are you going out of the city?"

"No. I shall be as safe here as anywhere, I think. I have spent a number of years in this country, and I know something of the curiosity of the provincial Yankee. It is wisest to avoid the country, and too much travel; I shall find me some attic, and lose myself amid the crowd."

A new look flashed into Miles La Croix's face. He turned suddenly to his daughter.

"My dear," he said, commandingly, "go; tell Margot that I am at home to no one for an hour. If anyone comes, you may receive them."

The words were a dismissal, the tone a command. Moina arose, bowed to the stranger, and went out.

"Now," said La Croix, turning to his guest, "let us talk freely. Do I understand that you have no mission here?"

"None, at present. What I may or may not do after a time depends upon my success in baffling my pursuers. You must consider that I have spent nearly eight years in Siberia. I know very

little of things on this continent. I am not too well informed in all things upon the other side, although I was qualifying fast," with a smile, "and hoped to be able to lend a hand, and perhaps pay an item or two of the score I owe to—the enemy. You see, I speak freely to you. I know myself safe in the hands of La Croix, the Inspired."

The old man flushed with pleasure.

"Yes," he said, "that is what they used to call me ; but they overrated me. Yes ! yes ! Then you would not refuse to become one of us here if you saw an opening for your talents?"

"I ! If the way were clear. If—I were not in danger of compromising you by allying myself with you. But if I am hunted you might fall under suspicion."

Miles La Croix reared his white head proudly.

"Is your enemy so dangerous, then. Is he more acute than you—or I, or—others?"

"He ! Ah, if it were only a 'he'? But the hunter is a woman."

"A woman !"

"Yes. A Russian lady of rank : skilful, dangerous, with any number of spies and agents at her command. I am not the only prey she seeks ; she has another mission."

"Do you know her name?"

"Unfortunately, no ; but I expect to learn it."

"And—have you chosen your new place of abode?"

"Alas ! no ; I dread to think of it. After years of isolation, to go into voluntary exile seems hard, doubly so, since I have found a congenial companion—a comrade."

"Well said ! a comrade." He got up and locked the door. "Draw your chair nearer," he said, resuming his own. "Let me tell you something of our work here ; and then—let me make you a proposition."

"With all my heart," said Fernand Makofski.

* * * * * *

An hour later, La Croix rang for Margot, and when she appeared he sent for Moina.

"My daughter," he said ; "you have heard Captain Makofski's story, and you know that for the present—his safety lies in seclusion. The captain is one of us. I cannot consent to his going amongst strangers, where, perhaps, there may be spies in the next room. He has consented, for a time, at least, to make his retreat with us ; we have room and to spare. You will see that the room next my own is made ready for him ; he will come to us at once."

"Yes, papa." Moina's face gave no sign of her inward perturbation, her surprise, and dismay.

"Captain Makofski need not live entirely secluded here ; he is something of an artist, and to the world in general he will pass as my pupil. As for our few intimate friends, he can trust them, as us, and I believe he will be a valuable comrade. In naming him before the servants you are to call him Captain Fernand. The name Makofski will only be used among ourselves."

"I understand."

"I trust I shall not be too troublesome a guest, Miss La Croix," said the captain ; "I assure you——"

But she interrupted him with a quick, graceful gesture. "My father's wishes are mine," she said, quickly; "we will try to make you comfortable."

"If you would try to make me useful," he said, bowing low, "you would help me to pay my debt."

She looked at him attentively for a moment.

"Perhaps I shall remember that," she said, and went slowly out.

Miles La Croix smiled upon her as she went; he looked eager and animated. His guest filled all his thoughts. He had not seemed so genial for many days.

"One thing occurs to me," he said, thoughtfully, and scanning the captain slowly from head to foot; "you are rather a striking personage, captain. Would it not be well for you to assume—ah, some sort of disguise—at least, shave, or change the fashion of your beard."

Captain Makofski strode to the door and locked it in his turn.

"I am going to burn my last bridge," he said, coming back and standing opposite his host; "I am going to put myself absolutely at your mercy. I owe you that confidence, in return for your kindness. I am *already disguised;* you have not asked for proofs of my sojourn in Siberia, but I offer them to you—*see!*"

He put up his hands, and suddenly removed, first, the thick beard and moustache, and then the wig of red-brown hair, and Miles La Croix gazed into a fine, firm face, clean shaven and handsome, and strong. On one side of the head the hair was thick, and a little more than an inch long; on the opposite side there was just an infinitesimal growth of down.

"In Siberia," said the captain, with bitterness in his face and voice, "to make us hideous, as well as wretched, they shave our heads on one side. You see, Fernand Makofski is not likely to show his true self until this mark of infamy has had time to erase itself."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A DETECTIVE'S PRICE.

WHILE Captain Fernand Makofski was bowing before the La Croix, Madeline Payne tapped lightly at the door of Princess Sacha's saloon and was promptly admitted by the maid.

"Madam is breakfasting in her dressing-room," said the woman, "if mademoiselle will please to enter, and to be seated," and she wheeled an easy-chair toward the fireplace, where a light wood flame was glowing.

"A fire," exclaimed Madeline smilingly, "and on such a morning," she drew the chair further from the blaze, and seated herself. "Do not trouble madam," she said carelessly, "let her finish her breakfast without interruption, I am not in haste."

The Frenchwoman had returned to the grate, near which stood a dainty gilded waste basket, filled to overflowing with papers and fragments of letters.

"This room, as you see, has not the morning sun," she said, standing beside the basket, "and Madam La Princess has always a fire

here for an hour or two; she likes it. If mademoiselle will permit," here she knelt beside the basket, "I will finish with this."

"By all means. It is certainly full enough."

The maid smiled, and began feeding with contents of the basket the lapping flames, moving it so that it stood midway between herself and Madeline, for her greater convenience, dropping the letters and papers slowly, and watching them flash up and turn to ashes.

For a moment or two Madeline watched this occupation in silence, then the pattern of the dainty basket attracted her, she moved nearer to it. "How pretty," she said, putting out her hand and turning it about, just as the woman took out another handful of papers. Then she started slightly, withdrew her hand, and put it suddenly back again.

As the maid turned again toward the fire, she leant and looked into the basket, looked closer, and then deliberately took from among the fragments a torn blotter.

"Allow me to look at this," she said coolly. "What a pretty design!" In one corner of the long blotter, a bit of unique Arabesque was outlined. Madeline quickly doubled back one half of the blotter, and holding it almost covered by her palm, leaned back and seemed absorbed in admiration. "I think it must be Russian," she murmured, while the maid continued to feed the fire with perfect unconcern. When all was consumed she arose, and just then a bell sounded.

"Madam rings," she said, and went from the room carrying the basket and nodding, as Madeline made a movement as if to throw the torn blotter upon the coals. When the curtain fell behind her, however, the hand and blotter were withdrawn, and when Madam La Princess swept into the room a moment latter, the hand was toying carelessly with the brown fur upon the pale rose of her négligé, and the blotter was safely reposing in her dainty pocket.

Sacha swept forward in her floating morning robe of white and gold, and as the two stood together exchanging greetings they formed a lovely picture, a contrast to delight the eye of a colourist, the one petite and *brune*, the other fair and stately.

In spite of her faith in Roger Drexel, and in his reasons, known and unknown, for subjecting Sacha Orloff to surveillance, Madeline felt herself instinctively and strangely drawn toward the little Russian. There was a certain dash and daring tempered always by perfect good breeding, a frankness or something which passed for frankness in all that the Princess Sacha said or did, that struck a responsive chord in Madeline's breast. Even now, as they stood gazing at each other with frankly admiring eyes, Madeline was saying to herself, "she is beautiful and proud and brave. Whatever her errors of judgment, her mistaken enthusiasm, she has at least the courage of her opinions," and then, with a quickly smothered sigh, "I wish I knew—I wish I knew!"

It will be perceived that Madeline Payne was slow to believe evil of her own sex.

On her side, Princess Sacha's admiration for Madeline was strong and frankly expressed. America and its institutions were all a new

discovery to her, and she questioned Madeline freely, and commented upon American ways in an original and often amusing fashion, that quite won Madeline's indulgence.

Different and yet alike, they "got on" together wonderfully well. Two beautiful women, royally clad, luxuriously surrounded, both rich, both free, and with the world before them. Something like this flashed through Madeline's mind as, turning to resume her seat, she caught a reflection of their two figures in a long mirror.

"And yet," she said to herself. "We are both—spies."

* * * * * *

When Roger Drexel presented himself before the Princess Sacha he found her alone and evidently awaiting his coming. She was dressed for her drive with Madeline, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes glowing with excitement.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, springing up as he appeared beneath the silken postern and coming swiftly toward him. "Ah, my friend, so at last you condescend to appear in person! Something must have happened, something important, else I should have received another of those brief notes you choose to call *reports!* Do you know, I more than half belief you have purposely avoided coming here?"

"If you had believed it wholly, madam, you would not have been in error," he said smiling slightly.

"What, you tell me so, to my face."

"Always to your face, madam."

"And why?" She turned and led the way to the lower end of the room, the end furthest from the door. "Sit here, monsieur," she said peremptorily, and then resuming her own place, she asked again, "And why?"

"Because—I do not choose to have my movements hampered by —espionage, and because there was nothing to communicate that might not as well be written as spoken."

"And now?"

"Now, I have something to say, something to ask."

She clasped her hands and leaned forward breathlessly. "Ah!" she said, "you have found something—some clue. Tell me; do not keep me in suspense."

For a moment he regarded her steadfastly. Then he began speaking slowly, with his eyes on her face.

"When you asked me to serve you," he said, "you told me that this was your object, your one object, in coming to America; that it was, in fact, the chief object of your life; that you were ready to devote to it time, money, life itself."

"True, true."

"You said, if I would find this friend or assurance of his fate, I might ask my own reward."

"And I say it now," she said. "I am rich, I care nothing for money——"

"Neither do I," he said, coldly.

"What—you! Oh, I see, you are an enthusiast, you love your profession. But I have some influence, too. If it is position. If you care to go abroad——"

"You might aid me, perhaps, to become an agent, an officer, of the Russian police? Thanks, madam, but my career as a detective is nearly run."

"Then you shall retire rich."

"I am rich already."

For a moment she gazed at him in astonishment, then she sank back upon her cushions. "Monsieur, I do not understand you," she said, coldly.

"But you shall. I am here to explain myself. I intend that you shall understand me before our search proceeds further; that we shall understand each other."

She bowed coldly.

"But first," he went on calmly, "let me say that I think I have found a clue. I hope to succeed."

"Ah!" the studied coldness was gone instantly. "Tell me——" she began again.

"One moment. I have reached the point in my research where all must be settled between us. I am going now to name my price."

"Name it, name anything. It is granted beforehand. Why waste time upon that."

"Wait, and undeceive yourself. It is not in money that you must pay me, Madam La Princess; I have more than enough. No, you have no cause for anger—yet. Wait until I have done, and decide *then* whether we continue to be allies—or enemies. Madam, you must be perfectly frank with me. You said at our first meeting that you desired the services of one who was *in no sense of the word* a revolutionist."

She started and paled, but her voice was calm and self-controlled. "True, and I gave my reasons," she said.

"And very plausible ones they were. Now hear what I have discovered, and, if you wish me to continue in your service, be quite frank; it is necessary. First, at the time of his disappearance from Russia and Europe, Basil Petrolowski was an active nihilist. Do not take the trouble to contradict me, I have left no room for doubt on this point. Now let me repeat a former question parried by you when I asked it first. Have you reason to suspect that he was 'removed' by private influence?"

She was very pale now, but her eyes flashed back upon his.

"Reasons! We do not always need *reasons*, we women. We have intuitions, instinct."

"Then you do not believe that he was spirited away for political reasons by the emissaries of the Tsar?"

"I will tell you what I think," she said with sudden fierce frankness. "The *means* may have been public, the secret police, perhaps, the *end* sought was private vengeance."

"Ah, now we are getting on. Continue to be thus frank, madam. To come to America, as you wished to come—unchallenged, unquestioned, you needed a pretext. I will not ask you if, previous to the disappearance of this man, you took any part in Russian political affairs, I simply ask if, when you determined to come to America, you did not decide to come as the agent—perhaps—of the government?"

She sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing. "Monsieur, this is too much. This is insolence."

He arose also. "As you will," he said, coldly. "Madame La Princess Orloff, at least you shall understand *me*. I *know* whereof I speak; I am prepared to support my statements. Such knowledge as I possess is *certain*. You are here upon a mission totally unconnected with the search for Basil Petrolowski. But I will be quite frank with you. Although *sure* of thus much, I do *not* know whether you are acting with the revolutionists, or for the Russian Government."

"Ah!" she murmured, and sank into her seat again. "Then, undoubtedly, you intend to make yourself certain on that point."

"Madam, I expect to get all further information that I require—from *you*."

"From *me!* You *are* bold."

"Let us have done with this." He in turn resumed his seat. "I am not hunting *you*, madam, I am not anxious as to your mission, except in so far as it may enable you to do me a service, a favour in turn for that which I intend to render you."

She had herself under perfect control once more. "Go on," she said, "I await your explanation. What is the favour you speak of?"

"First, I am to find for you Basil Petrolowski, or the truth concerning him."

"Ah, if you *will!*"

"I will, and then——"

"And then——"

"I shall ask a service of *you*. I ask now for your promise. When *my* part is done, and you know all, I shall ask you then to do this thing for me. Do you agree?"

"What you ask may not be in my power."

"I shall ask nothing that is out of your power, nothing that will be difficult or dangerous. You know my terms, I want no other reward."

"Is it a personal service?"

"It is as impersonal *to me* as is my search for Basil Petrolowski."

She was silent for some moments, then she bent forward and put out her hand.

"Bring me Basil Petrolowski if he is alive, or the whole truth as to his fate, if he is dead, and I promise, I *swear*, to render you any service that is within my power; anything—*anything*. Here is my hand."

He took her hand and arose. "No more words are needed," he said. "You will not see me again until my task is done, and I come to claim my reward. One thing makes my progress difficult."

"What thing?"

"The lack of any picture by which to identify."

"Ah! How I wish I had one; even the poorest." Her face had softened. There were tears in her voice.

As he emerged from the apartments of Princess Sacha and walked slowly down the corridor, he passed an open door, and, an instant after, heard a voice close behind him, a voice he recognized at once.

"Stop, sir."

He turned quickly, and confronted Madeline. There was no shadow of recognition upon the face of either, only slight surprise in his.

"Pardon me, sir, this paper fell from your pocket, I think." She thrust a small folded paper into his hand and turned quickly away.

CHAPTER L.

BEGINNING TO BURN.

MADELINE'S sudden appearance in the corridor was a surprise to Drexel, but he knew instinctively that it had its meaning. Not a sign of recognition had passed between them, and thrusting the note into his pocket he went on and entered the smoking-room, meaning to wait there, according to his original intention, until Madeline and Princess Sacha had left upon their drive.

Seating himself carelessly, and a little aloof from the other loungers, he took the little note from his pocket and opened it.

"*I have discovered this morning*," it said, "*that the writer of the two letters of warning sent to Mr. Lord was in all likelihood Madam La Princess. I have found in her waste basket the blotter used when the first of the letters was written. Both blotter and letters are at your service.*"

That was all, and Roger Drexel twisted it into a lighter, and going to the little bronze lamp always alight for the use of smokers, he coolly thrust it into the tiny flame, lighted a cigar with it, and watched it burn to ashes in his fingers.

"Bravo!" he said to himself as he resumed his seat. "Miss Payne is a woman in a thousand. We are beginning to burn."

Half-an-hour later, he saw through the open window the departure of Madeline and the Princess, both looking as high-bred, beautiful and care-free as if no such words as anxiety and intrigue were known to their vocabulary. Ten minutes more, and he was again applying for admittance at the Princess Sacha's door.

"I wish to see Madam the Princess Orloff," he said to the maid who opened it.

"Madam the Princess has gone out, monsieur."

"Not the Princess Orloff, the mother of madam?"

"Ah! no." There was a note of surprise in the maid's answer. "Enter, monsieur, I will see if Madam the Princess will receive you."

"Say to her," he said easily, "that it is simply to leave a message forgotten before. I will not detain her."

There was hardly a moment of waiting, and the elder "Princess Orloff" entered the room; she was pale and seemed agitated. He thought that she looked even more wan and frail than when he had seen her first. Drexel advanced to meet her and drew toward her an easy-chair with a respectful deference quite unlike his cold and dignified bearing in the presence of the Princess Sacha. She sank into the proffered seat and looked anxiously into his face.

"You wished to speak with me, monsieur," she said, deprecatingly.

"Yes, madam, and what I have to say need not agitate you. I am seeking to serve you."

She bowed silently. Then, as he remained standing, "Be seated, monsieur," she said with gentle dignity.

He drew a chair toward her and sat down.

"Madam, I wish to be perfectly frank with you. You know the nature of my business with the Princess Sacha Orloff?"

"Yes." She was too much agitated to display surprise that he spoke thus of one who was recognized as her daughter, and he noted this.

"Then you must know that in my capacity of detective I must study closely, and am likely to discover many things."

"Yes," she whispered again.

"Madam, I beg of you, do not be startled or alarmed. I see that you are anxious, and not strong. Believe me, my sympathy is with you. I am your friend, and trying to serve you." He was speaking slowly and gently. "But—I know—I surmised from the first—that you are not the mother of the Princess Sacha. That you are, in fact, that kind foster-mother of whom she has spoken so gratefully, so tenderly. You are—the mother of Basil Petrolowski."

She grew still paler, she was pitifully agitated. Her lips moved mechanically, but no sound came from them.

"I can understand your anxiety," he went on, still very gently, "and cannot question your methods. In assuming the position of the mother of the Princess Orloff you have done her a service beyond question. I do not come to you to criticise, but to ask for your help, for such aid as you can perhaps give me, in your own service."

"Ah," she sighed, "I do not understand."

"But you shall. In my search for your son I am hampered by the lack of any picture of him that might so readily lead to his identification. I know a mother's heart, and I have wondered if—if it might not be that out of your loss and wreck you had preserved some likeness, the only one, perhaps, hoarding it, lest you be bereft of it, keeping the fact of its possession a secret, maybe, even from the Princess, who might have had the courage to give it up, if she thought it necessary to our success."

He paused, she had put her hands to her face, and was sobbing wildly. He got up and walked about the room giving her time to recover herself; when the sobbing became less violent, he came back and stood by her side.

"I do not wish to take it from you," he said, softly. "If you will let me see it, just for a moment. I ask no more, my memory is good, and I will keep your secret. You must say nothing of my return to the Princess, and then I need not explain to her *why* I came. One sight of that picture, remember, may help me," he hesitated, and almost faltered over these words, "may help to find your son."

"You are very good," she faltered, "and—I *could* not give it up. It was all I had left of him. My only boy! and if Sacha had known——"

"I understand. You could not have possessed it alone. But

now time passes. Show me the picture, dear madam, and trust me. Can you trust your maid as well?"

"Jeanne is devoted to me," she said, rising and going slowly toward a curtained door. Then turning back with piteously quivering lips, "You will not take it from me?"

"Not for a moment. I swear it."

She was gone but a moment, but in that moment her manner had changed. She seemed eager and excited now. Tears shone in her eyes.

"We must be quick," she whispered, "If *she* should come back—she must not see it. It would never be all mine again and—it *is* mine by right—I am his mother." She held a velvet case in her hands. This she opened with a reverent, tender touch, and, after one long pathetic look, she held it out to him, with quivering lips and trembling hands.

"That is Basil," she said softly.

He took it from her hand and bent his head over it. The pictured face was a handsome one, with its spirited poise of head; its regular features, smooth but for a slight moustache; its close cropped curling hair and fine dark eyes. It was a long minute before Drexel removed his gaze from it and lifted his head. And then he did not meet her questioning gaze.

He closed the case with a touch almost as reverent as her own, and put it back into her hand.

Suddenly a new thought seem to strike and startle her.

"Oh!" she said, "have I been all wrong. Blindly selfish. Would this in your hands have helped you to find Basil sooner? Would it help you now?" Even as she questioned him, she drew back a pace and pressed the picture to her heart.

"No," he said gravely, "you have only done what is natural, what was right, as it has happened. It is all best as it is. Keep your picture as secretly as before, if it pleases you to do so. *It will not be needed.*"

"You are sure you will remember the face?"

"I will remember the face," and in his heart, he added, "to my dying day."

"And—you will find my boy—my Basil?"

"Madam, I have promised to do my best."

"But you have a hope—a clue. Surely Sacha was not mistaken. She told me so," she put out her hands; eyes, voice, and face were pleading. His heart was filled with compassion, he took her hands in his, "Dear madam, I hope to be able to bring some news soon. I trust it may——" he broke off abruptly and turned his eyes away. "I must not be here when the Princess returns," he said hurriedly, "and you—you are agitated, you must have time to compose yourself. This meeting is our secret, madam, I thank you very much for your trust in me. You shall find that it has not been misplaced." When he was outside he said to himself,

"If I stayed there a moment more I should have blundered, have shown my feelings too plainly. Poor woman! Poor mother! and she has only shown me the way to break her poor frail heart!"

CHAPTER LI.

A LITTLE DETECTIVE.

"HULLO!"

"'Lo."

The salutation was cheerily uttered, and evidently intended to be ingratiating. The reply was indifferent, not to say sullen.

The first speaker stood with hands in pockets, and shabby hat cocked sidewise, the very picture of a street arab—upon the dirty pavement, directly before the second, who sat upon the low step before the shabby entrance to a tumble-down frame tenement house.

"What cher doin'?"

"Nothin'; can't yer see." The boy upon the doorstep was small and puny, dressed in tatters, and of a pale, hungry, unsmiling countenance.

The other, somewhat larger, perhaps a little older, and with a much more vigorous physique, stood still, and while he seemed lost in meditation began to toy with a handful of gaily-tinted marbles, which he drew from his pocket one or two at a time.

Instinctively the lad upon the doorstep fell to watching the little balls dancing up and down in the deft dirty hand. He of the marbles seemed to have forgotten his existence. He stooped deliberately in the middle of the pavement, and, arranging his marbles, began a solitary game. The street was by no means a highway, nevertheless he was soon hustled out of the way by two or three loud-talking women. He gathered up his marbles and said crossly,

"Cost anything to set on that step?"

"Ah-uhm," said the boy without taking his eyes off the marbles. Their owner seated himself and resumed his game. Presently he looked up, and caught the wan boy in the act of watching him eagerly.

"Got any marbles?" he asked.

The wan boy shook his head.

"Want ter play?"

"I don't care," morosely.

"Come on, then; I'll lend ye some."

So the acquaintance began.

"Say," said the owner of the marbles, after close attention to two or three games, "do you live round here?"

"Yes."

"Fur?"

"I live *here*."

"Got any job?"

"No, not now."

"Ain't ye? Then let's go down to the court there. It's a bully place to play, and nobody to crowd ye out every half-minit."

"I can't," said the boy, dropping back into sullenness; "I've got to stay here."

"On this doorstep?"

"Yes."

"What for? What ye done?"

"I hain't done nothin' that I hadn't orter. Gran won't let me go away. I'm wanted to run errands sometimes."

"Oh-h!" said the owner of the marbles, indifferently. "Le's have another game. Say," he broke out after a time, "do ye know many folks hereabouts?"

"Um—hum."

"D'ye ever see a tall man with big whiskers and a big red nose round here?"

"No—why?"

"'Cause, darn him! he got me to do a job for him, and he paid me well, and said he'd want me ag'in to-day, and he'd meet me at the corner yonder, but he warnt there. He told me to kinder hang out round here, he might need me more'n *once*, and, jimini! he's good pay."

"What kind of job was it?" asked the smaller boy, who was thawing gradually, but still bore himself in a guarded manner.

The other winked knowingly. "I ain't givin' good things away. 'Twarnt none of yer common jobs, sech as takin' parcels or carrying letters, no sir-*ree*. I kin *jest* beat ye one more game." When the game ended, he gathered up his marbles and bestowed upon his companion a friendly grin. "I'll jest roam around a bit and look out for my man with the nose. Ta, ta, sonny; I'm sorry yer gran won't let ye off the doorstep." And he swaggered away.

The sullen look returned intensified upon the face of the boy on the doorstep. He looked after the other until he was out of sight. Perhaps he regretted the loss of the boy's society, certainly he regretted the marbles.

The next day, as the boy sat, as before, alone upon the step, a blithe voice hailed him.

"Hullo, sonny, been settin' there ever since?"

"No."

This time the visitor seated himself at once. "Tell ye what," he began, "I was jest in luck yisterday. Hedn't left ye five minits hardly afore I found my man."

"Did ye?" with interest.

"You *bet!* and I've done another good bit o' payin' work. I tell ye what," he rattled on, as if intoxicated with his own prosperity, "that's the kind of biz for me! No more sellin' newspapers, no more carryin' parcels, for Johnny Deegan. There, that's my name; now, what's yourn?"

"Hans," said the other, "Hans Kressler." Then he started, and looked involuntarily over his shoulder.

Johnny Deegan, seeming not to have heard, took from his pocket a small paper containing some highly coloured, stoutly flavoured sweets, and proffered it to Hans. "It's my treat," he explained. "When a feller gits a good job like that he kin afford a little blow out."

"Did ye earn—much?" asked Hans, with his mouth full of candy.

"Heh!" Johnny jingled some coins in his pocket, and then produced a handful of change. "Feast yer eyes on that," he said, "and it ain't all nuther, an', what's more, there's a good show for a good long job, good pay an' grub along with it. I ain't *sure* but the cove said that he might need two or three smart boys, and for me to be around handy in case he wanted me." He proffered the candy once more, and abruptly changed the subject. His quick eye had noted the gleam in the face of Hans at the mention of "pay and grub." "Ye see," he said, when two or three games of marbles had been played and all the candy eaten, "ye see I ain't like you; I ain't got no fambly to bother about, and I kin do as I like. I've found a good place ter bunk, and as long 's my chink holds out, I kin eat where I like. Is yer granny good to ye?"

"Sometimes," said Hans, gloomily.

As the week wore away Hans, on his doorstep, found himself looking more and more anxiously for the coming of Johnny Deegan.

For a few days, Johnny was full of cordiality and liberal with his marbles and sweets. He chatted freely about himself, relating many adventures, all calculated to show the advantages of being "without a fambly;" and while he manifested no curiosity concerning Hans and his "gran," he managed to arouse much in the mind of the boy.

After a few days, he came later and his visits were shorter. On these days Hans found time drag, and himself looking with growing anxiety for his daily visitor.

One day Johnny arrived earlier than usual, seeming much elated. "Well," he said, jauntily, "we'll have one more game for luck. I'm goin' ter change my hotel to-morrow. I've got the job, an' it's a good one, *I* tell ye!"

"What are you goin' to do?" faltered Hans.

Johnny leered at him knowingly. "Look here, sonny," he said, "ye mustn't ask questions. 'Tain't no common biz, let me tell yer. Yer a good sort o' chap, and I'd like ter tell ye jest to see yer eyes bung out. But, no. Ye'd tell yer gran—'twouldn't do; 'sides, I ain't got time. I'll play ye jest one game, an' then I'm off. I've got to find another feller to work with me, and I don't know jest where ter git the one I want."

Hans looked up, about, and behind him, and then came closer to Johnny. "Hush," he said, "don't let gran hear you. How would I do?"

"But," objected Johnny, with well assumed surprise, "yer gran won't let ye go; besides——"

"I don't care!" and Hans clutched eagerly at his arm, "I'll run away. Gran's always twitting me 'cause she has to feed me, though I've earned a lot of money, as well as you."

"You! Come now, how?"

"Say you'll take me, and I'll tell you, after I git away from gran."

"Look here," said Johnny, seriously, "ain't you a-jokin'?"

"No, I mean it, every word"

"But this ain't no common work, I tell ye. Look here, Hans, I like ye first-rate, if ye *do* look mighty babyish, a-settin' here on these old doorsteps, an' I'm sorry for ye, but," here he suddenly struck his hands together as if startled by some new thought. "No, Hans, 'tain't no use, I can't do it ; and, look here, I'll tell ye *why*, I hadn't orter, but I want ye to know why I got to go back on ye, only ye must promise, hope to die, ye won't never breathe it."

"I promise," whispered Hans, eagerly. "Hope to die, I do."

"Hans, did ye ever hear of the 'Banded Brothers'?"

"Do you mean the Knights?"

"Naw! Them's *men* growed up. The 'Banded Brothers' is all boys like me, and we're bound to help each other, and stand by each other, an' to fight our oppressors, an' revenge one another's wrongs, jest the same as the Knights does, an' we're down on the money-kings, an' we sympathizes with the strikers an' help 'em all we can. Well, Hans, *I'm* a 'Banded Brother,' an' it's my duty to help my brothers. If you was one of us 'twould be all right. I wish ye *could* join us, but then there's yer gran, 'twouldn't do, an' don't ye see, Hans, I *ort* to go an' give this nice fat job I've found fer me and another boy, to one of the 'Banded Brothers'?"

Wiser and older heads than that of Hans have been turned by the sophistry of the tempter. Hans was quivering with excitement, his eager little face was thrust close to Johnny's, the red dyeing his sallow cheeks.

"Don't you never tell," he whispered hastily. "You won't, will you?"

"Me! The 'Banded Brothers' never peaches, Hans."

"Well, then, *I'm* a Knight."

Johnny started back assuming a dramatic attitude.

"I *am*. My uncle, gran's only boy, got killed in one of the big strikes, an' she's hated the bloated aristocracy ever since, an' taught me to, she won't let me work for them nor be helped by them, we're *anarchists!*"

"Phwew!"

"And I've done. Well, I guess if I told you what *I'd* done, you'd say I was fit to be a 'Banded Brother.'"

"Done! you? such a little feller. *You* couldn't do much."

"That's it, it's jest because I'm little that I *could* help. A *man* couldn't have done what I did. YOU couldn't have done it."

"Oh, come now! What're ye givin' us!"

"It's true, you're too big. I'm a *Knight*, I am, I tell you! Say you'll take me! say you will."

"Look a here, sonny," said Johnny, with a fine air of being impressed against his better judgment. "I'm goin' ter tell ye the square truth, and if ye ever give me away, I'll come down on ye with the hull gang of 'Banded Brothers,' and we'll jest about clean ye out, hear?"

"Oh, I won't tell! I *won't!*"

"This is jest how it stands. If I say the word you git the job. My boss, he says to me like this, 'Johnny, you suit me bang up. Now you ought to know another boy of your own sort, and if you do I want

you to bring him to me, I'll pay you alike, and you'll sleep and work together,' see!"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Now here's the sticker. You can't imagine what you'd have to do. Come closer, let me whisper, don't see any cops around, do ye?"

Hans jumped up the step and looked scared. "Pshaw!" said Johnny, "you're too nervous. Listen, my first job I had to watch a house all day 'thout any dinner, an' my next, I had to foller a feller half over town and not let him see me nor 'spect me nother, an' he said," here he put his mouth close to Hans' ear, "he said that we *might* have to git into somebody's house, an' not be caught at it. *There!*" Johnny drew back, and seemed waiting for his effect. Much to his apparent surprise, Hans threw back his head and laughed, his face had lighted up, he looked proud and confident.

"Why!" he said with fine scorn, "*that's* nothing, I can do that, *too*, slick; I *have* done it—for the Knights, that's why they made me one."

* * * * * *

An hour later Johnny Deegan and the tall man with the blonde beard were closeted together in a little humble room, which Johnny had occupied more or less since he ceased to be a bootblack.

"I've got him," said the boy, "got him dead to rights! I said everything you told me to, an' he jest tumbled," and Johnny dramatized, for the benefit of his patron, the scenes between himself and little Hans. "It 'pears," he said in conclusion, "that his granny is always a-twittin' him with bein' good for nothin', an' has been a trainin' him ter be a reg'lar roarin' striker, annikrist, an' Hans says that sometimes she says things that makes him think she ain't his real granny; anyhow, he's awful afraid of her, an' the old man, too, but he's been itchin' to run away this ever so long."

"You have done well, Johnny," said his patron. "You will bring the boy here to-night, and to-morrow I will provide you with quarters in another part of the city. We can keep the boy quiet a while, through his fear of being found by his grandmother, or the old Jew."

"Why, ain't you goin' to put us on a job?" queried Johnny.

"My boy, you've already done a very good job, and I am going to trust you now with a great secret. I am going to make a little detective of you. You said, you know, that you wanted to be a detective."

"Gosh!" cried the delighted boy.

"And your first job will be to take good care of this boy Hans, for me, to make him attached to you, and not to let him out of your sight until further orders. If you succeed in this, you shall go into regular service, you shall never black another boot."

Johnny fairly danced with delight.

"Tell me what to do," he cried, "I'll *do* it. *You bet* I'll do it!"

CHAPTER LII.

HOSMER AT WORK.

No. 29, Short Street was indeed an humble abode, a cottage small and old, but neat and orderly without and within. As he approached the low unpainted door, Kenneth Hosmer noted both the neatness and the poverty, and felt, on the instant, for the woman who opened it for him, a thrill of respectful pity.

He was dressed like a working-man out for a holiday, clean and trim. He touched his cap as he met her inquiring gaze, and his frank handsome face spoke loudly in his favour, coupled thus with this little respectful act, none too common, alas! in the life of the poor mechanic's wife.

"Is your husband at home, ma'am?" he asked.

She gave him a long, slow look before she answered.

"No, sir; he ain't at home just now, but he'll be here soon. Did you want him particular?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice, a question in her tired, anxious eyes.

"I—well, not so particular. I had promised to come to see him, and as I had time to-day—but, of course, I can come again." He made a movement as if to turn away.

"Excuse me," she said hastily. "Won't you please tell me your name?"

"Yes'm—certainly." He gave the name by which he had introduced himself to Joseph Parker, and her countenance changed instantly. It was just as if she felt relief at his coming. He saw it, and it caused him to wonder.

"Won't you please to come in, sir." She swung the door wide. "He will be here soon, and glad to see you. It's a poor place, but you're very welcome." He followed her inside, and she went on talking nervously while she passed him a chair and dusted it, quite unnecessarily, with her apron. "He's spoke of you so often, I seem almost to know you. I'm glad that you've come, for he's been very low in his mind for a day or two, and you can cheer him a bit maybe."

"I!" Hosmer was nonplussed. Her volubility placed him at a disadvantage. But he rallied his forces, and, after uttering some commonplace remarks, transferred his attention to a robust infant, perhaps a year old, which wakened opportunely, and was at once lifted from its cradle. This was a prolific source of conversation, and a delightful one to the mother. But presently the bright, good-natured eyes closed again; and as she replaced it in its nest, the anxious look came back to her face.

"It's high time that Joseph was here," she said uneasily. "I feel anxious when he's out long now. He's got something on his mind; and—I may as well out with it—like as not you know it, anyhow. Joseph drinks a bit sometimes—oh!" seeing his look of surprise, "not to *s'ree*, or the like of that; but when he's worried, then he likes a

glass, and it makes him—queer." She stopped, and continued to gaze at him wistfully. The young masquerader was actually embarrassed.

"I'm very sorry," he said, and there was genuine sympathy in his voice. He did not dream what a wholesome confidence-winning fellow he looked in his tidy workman's clothes.

Suddenly she drew her chair nearer to his, and lowered her voice.

"I'm going to be over-bold, sir," she said hurriedly. "But you look kind and—and honest."

Kenneth winced.

"I'm going to ask you not to drink with Joseph if he asks you to-day, and to keep him from it if you can. And there's something else. We've seen hard times, Joseph and me. He belonged to the union, and then left it. Everything went against us, and about a year ago he joined again. But, somehow, he's out of conceit with unions, and to-day he has been declaring that he would quit the unions, if we all starve in a batch."

"Has anything happened to make him dissatisfied again?" asked Kenneth, with sudden interest. "Pardon me, but your husband has told me something of his experience with the unions."

"Well, I suppose something there must have struck him as wrong. You see, he reads the newspapers a good deal, and always looks up everything about strikes and boycotts, and the like; and sometimes he rages fit to scare you about some of their foolishness, as he calls it. Yesterday he was reading the *Morning Echo*, and all at once down goes the paper, and up jumps Joseph; he gives the paper a kick out of the way, and begins to walk up and down, and he did look enough to scare a body. Then out he breaks a swearin'; a calling somebody hounds and bloody villins, and such like; and then he roars out that he's done with the unions for good and all, starve or no starve; he'll beg or steal before he'll work for them any more. It was awful."

"Did you find what it was in the paper that roused him so?"

"No, and that's the curious part of it. I took up the paper after he was gone out, for I couldn't get a word out of him, and I looked it over and over; but *I* couldn't find anything about strikes, or unions, or such."

"I would like to see that paper."

"You can. He ain't never looked at it since, and I put it away against he might want it. Here it is," and she took from a high shelf a folded copy of the *Morning Echo*, and put it in his hand.

"Do you remember how the paper was folded when he threw it down?"

"Just as it is now. He had only begun to read, and hadn't got over the first page."

Kenneth unfolded the paper, and, almost at the first glance, his eyes rested upon the following startling headlines:—

"*Murder in the House of a Millionaire.*"
"*Stabbed in his bed,*" etc., etc.

Hosmer started, and involuntarily lowered the paper; then lifted it again, and forced himself to scan the entire page. Beyond this long and sensational account of the murder of poor Hovey, there was

absolutely nothing to have roused ire, or even interest, in the breast of a man like Parker; and there was not even a paragraph concerning unions, strikes, or "the like," as Mrs. Parker would have said. A strange thought was taking shape in Kenneth's mind as he continued to feign interest in a further scrutiny of the paper.

"What do you think it was?" she asked wistfully.

"I can't tell. Perhaps he happened to think of something just then. It might not have been the paper."

"Oh, I'm *sure* it was. He had been good-natured enough before. And then his words; and as quick as he got a dram, which was soon, he began to say more, and he *did* say such things about the unions. That's why I asked you not to drink with him." Mrs. Parker was getting incoherent. She had quite lost sight of the fact that he was a stranger. "And, sir, don't say anythink against the union to him now. Don't advise him to quit it. What would become of us? And nothink laid by. Oh, sir, it's hard. And Joseph was always a good man, a good father to the children. If he *should* take to the drink——"

There was a sound upon the step outside. She flung him a last appealing glance, as she hastened to replace the paper, and Kenneth had just time to say under his breath,

"Trust me, ma'am, I will try my best for you." And then the door swung open, and Joseph Parker was before them.

It was evident from his manner, as well as from the look his wife gave him, that he had repeated his dram. He was not so despondent as when he went away; but quite as full of wrath, and at just that stage of intoxication when talking is a delight, and caution thrown to the winds.

He would not stay inside. They "could talk better out-a-door," he said; and when he had got Hosmer fairly outside, he added, "'Taint best to talk too much afore the women. It makes them want to argify."

Hosmer smiled, and then started as he remembered that he had dropped his "dialect" while talking with Mrs. Parker. "It's well he got me out before I had a chance to go on in that strain," he thought. "It might have surprised my friend Joseph, mellow though he certainly is."

They had not gone far, Hosmer purposely keeping silence, before Parker put a brawny hand upon his shoulder. "Well, lad," he said, "it's hopin' you've thought better of things since those anarchist fellows did ye such a bad turn. You ain't so fond of the s'cieties, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know. Them fellows were a couple of Huns, ye know. Beastly foreigners. Ye don't s'pose they wus union men, do ye?"

"Humph! I guess ye kin find plenty of foreigners in the union nowadays."

"But they'd be turned out if they was caught doin' a thing like that, wouldn't they? Come, now, don't be too hard on the unions."

"Hard!" Joseph ground out an oath between his teeth: "if I had

a son, and I had to choose between lettin' him join one of these 'ere new societies and lettin' him go right off an' turn thief and burglar, a burglar he'd be. He'd be his own boss, an' be doin' his own dirty work *then*, not somebody else's."

"Talking about burglars," broke in Kenneth, seizing the opportunity thus made for him, "did ye hear about that housebreakin' business up on Fifth Avenue?—some rich banker's, I b'lieve. Broke in an' killed one of the servants—killed him in his bed."

Instantly the face of the man beside him grew livid. His hands were clenched, and then flung outward in a violent gesture.

"Heard it," he cried, "have I *heard* it? Ain't I all the time hearing it? Can't I fairly *see* it!" They were walking down a secluded street, chosen by Kenneth in order to avoid the saloons. Parker, after getting away from his home, had seemed not to know nor care which way they went.

"Murdered in his bed, was he?" went on Joseph Parker. "Killed in his sleep! The poor devil! Oh, can't I *see* the miserable devil at his work. Look here, he goes round through the alley and up to the back basement door. It is a glass door, so he cuts a pane—no, I forgot, there are *two*—and they get in over the transom first, and then open the door. Then through the little hall, up the back stairs, into the front of the house, up the big, square stairs, creep, creep, turn, turn, then straight on to the old man's door, knife in one hand, lantern in t'other. Ah, *what* a house! It looked——" He turned in the eagerness of his narrative, and then he stopped short, and the hot blood flew into his face.

"Well," said his companion, "go on; ye tell it like—like you had seen it yourself."

"Me; how should *I* see it?" angrily. "Don't I read the newspapers; ain't it all there?"

"Of course, of course it is. That's jest my jokin'. But, come now, honest Injun. Be you really down on the societies?"

"I'm down on 'em," said Parker violently; "I'm down on 'em so *hard*, that I won't never darken their doors again, not if they boycott me a hundred times over, not if they drive me out of the country, not if they *kill* me!"

"My dear man,"—Hosmer's manner was very winning, at once confiding and confidence-inviting—"it would be worth something to be as well posted as you. I know a feller you ought to talk to. You make me think of him. *He's* down on the socialists now, *I* tell you. Hates 'em, an' he'll work ag'in 'em too. Yes, sir, a few such men as him and you might do something toward exposin' these fellers if they're usin' the societies ter cloak their meanness. That's the way *I'd* take ter git even, if the old unions went back on *me*."

"Umph!" grunted Parker; but it was easy to see that he was caught by the idea. "'Tain't so easy."

"Wait till you've seen my man. Now look here, for instance: ye know these newspaper fellers; they're allus on the look-out for somethin' spicy, and they're most of 'em down on the anarchists and that

lot. Now, s'pose two or three honest fellows that know what they're talkin' about jest up and tell what they know about the crooked doings of the gang. No names, mind. The newspapers wouldn't want to print no names, cause that wouldn't do no good, and might do hurt. The story'll sell the papers without any name. It would help ye to git even with the unions, and it might be a warnin' to some others—like me, now. You've about turned *me* ag'inst the hull boodle of 'em."

Parker had linked his hand within his companion's arm. Now he drew closer to him. "Look here," he said impressively, "if I should tell—what I could tell—you've no ideer of it! It u'd make as big a stir as—as that murder you spoke of." He spoke with an odd mixture of hesitation and bravado. "You've no ideer," he repeated musingly.

"It might be a good thing fer yer," suggested Hosmer; "it would make friends of all the men that's ag'in the unions an' the like; an', ye know, there's a lot of rich men turnin' agi'n them. Rich men, some of 'em, are bandin' *themselves* together and swearin' not to hire any more union men. Gosh, Parker! I wish you could hear that feller talk that I spoke of; *he* could advise ye. I'm yer *friend*, of course, and I'll do anything in the world for ye. I'll stand by ye whatever comes, and I'll share what little I've got with ye when ye want it; but that man's smart. I wish ye'd tell him yer hull story."

Joseph was captured. "If I tell my—affairs to any man," he said, "it will be to you. I hain't known ye long, but I know ye're *square*. Didn't I see ye stand up alongside o' that policeman? I don't know as I'd mind—havin' *you* know all about it." They moved on slowly and in silence for a few paces. Hosmer's conscience was pricking him sorely. What was this man about to tell him? After all, would it be of any real service to Drexel? And if not—well, at any rate, he would not throw Parker over. He would not let his family want.

He did not know all Drexel's reasons for seeking to fathom the secret of Parker's quarrel with the unions. He knew that his friend was seeking in many directions for clues—but to what end? More than once he had asked himself this question, while never once doubting Drexel.

"Say," said Joseph, "let's go somewhere and git somethin' to drink."

Again that troublesome conscience smote Hosmer. He thought of Mrs. Parker and his promise to her; then he glanced sidewise at Joseph. He had but to turn about, to go with him into the nearest saloon, find a quiet corner where talk would be uninterrupted, and the secret would be his—Drexel's. Would the end justify the means? Joseph halted, waiting for his answer.

"Come," he said, and turned short round. "I'll make it up to *her*," he said to himself; "and whatever comes of it, I'll see him through."

A moment later they were entering the saloon together.

CHAPTER LIII.

"I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND."

POOR Hovey, whose life had been sacrificed to his master, was buried with all honour from the house where he met his death : buried like a son rather than a servant, and followed to the grave by Madeline and Dr. Vaughan, by Mrs. Ralston, the Girards, and the Follingsbees.

Mr. Lord did not come to the city. Fate, or providence, seemed to have been in league with Dr. Vaughan to prevent this. When the doctor returned to him on the evening that followed the awful discovery, he found him worse, suffering so much pain that any thought of movement or change was simply out of the question. To keep the horrible news from him was impossible, and when he had been told, he grieved and raged himself into a fever. This was no more than Vaughan had expected, and as it did not assume a dangerous form, but was sufficiently serious and painful to put all thought of travel quite out of his patient's head, he was, for once, rather thankful than otherwise that it was so ; no worse, and no better.

"Poor Hovey!" the sick man said, between groans of pain. "Poor honest, faithful fellow! A martyr in my stead! I shall never forgive myself for putting him in that cursed room. Tell Follingsbee to do everything as if it were for myself. It *ought* to have been myself!"

"If you had closed your house," said the doctor, "and had let it be known that you were out of town, you would, no doubt, have been hunted out, and it *would* have been yourself."

"Do you think I find that consoling," Lord cried, testily ; "I tell you, doctor, if it were not for this confounded pain, I would go back to-day, nothing should stop me ; and I WILL go back. If they are bent on killing me, very good. I will have no more scapegoats."

When this determination was communicated to Drexel, through Madeline, he looked grave.

"I expected that," he said.

"But must we not prevent it?"

"It will be difficult, if he has made up his mind. It would have to be accomplished by stratagem. How long will this illness keep him a prisoner?"

"A week at least, the doctor thinks ; perhaps longer."

"I have been thinking about this," Drexel said, "and hardly believe the plotters will make another attempt. Perhaps it will be as well—be *best* even, that he *should* come back. Our reticence concerning the murder, and the manner in which the newspapers have treated it, would, naturally, put them on their guard. The affair evidently was meant to create a sensation. Thanks to Mr. Follingsbee, they have been thwarted in their great effect."

"And for that very reason will they not try again?"

"They will try again, I *think*. But I doubt if it will be in the same quarter."

"Oh! And must there be other victims? Is there no means of warning them?"

"I am trying to find a way. Of course, the task is difficult. I think," he said, slowly, "if Mr. Lord persists in coming back, we will not oppose him."

"Then he will need to be watched, to be doubly guarded."

"Leave that to me," he said.

The day after Hovey's funeral, an account of the same appeared, as a matter of course, in the morning papers. Following the account proper, came this added item, in *The Sun*:—

"There is a mystery connected with this murder that does not appear to the public. Two suggestive facts are here mentioned for the first time: first, that the man Hovey was sleeping in his master's bed-chamber when he was assassinated; second, the name or names of the detectives who are investigating this case are not known. It is believed that clues are being carefully followed up, and that, sooner or later, the perpetrators of this bloody deed will find themselves entrapped."

Some days later, another paragraph made its appearance.

"Mr. Elias Lord, the banker, whose palatial Fifth Avenue residence was the scene of the late ghastly murder, has returned to the city. He went to the country for the benefit of his health. But he now declares himself determined to remain here until the mystery surrounding the strange taking off of his footman, Hovey, is cleared up. He believes that he understands the motive for the crime, and has a clue which will lead to the detection of its perpetrators."

In both of these paragraphs the initiated would doubtless trace the hand of Roger Drexel, alias *Hurst*.

He had thought seriously before taking this step, and it seemed, after due reflection, the only course open to him. That it would rouse the suspicions of the terrorists he knew: He knew, too, that it would make them doubly cautious. The fact that Mr. Lord would not consent to go into retirement again he determined to turn to advantage.

"This is how they will reason," he said to Madeline. "Seeing Mr. Lord going and coming about his usual business, they will believe that he is thoroughly and systematically guarded. They will fancy any number of private detectives hunting them down. The fact that we keep our own council will alarm them more than any amount of ventilation would have done. I think I can predict with tolerable certainty that, *for a time*, Mr. Lord may rest unmolested. They will not give up; but they will postpone. They will strive to meet cunning with cunning."

In this, as we know, Drexel judged rightly.

After the burial of Hovey and a final conference with the officers who were nominally in charge of the investigation, Drexel sought another interview with Madeline. It was long and full of interest to her, and at its close he bade her adieu as if for an indefinite absence.

"Our meetings must be few, hereafter," he said. "When it is necessary that we see each other, it will have to be after dark, and wherever the circumstances of the case suggests. You shall *hear* from me meantime—*once a week—when a letter fails it will be time to call* in Vaughan."

Previous to the date of his illness, Miles La Croix had held his most secret councils in the small apartment where we last saw Crashaw, Passauf, and Dr. Lugos together. Usually their councils had been limited to three or four, for at first Lugos was not with them. And, sometimes, Passauf was absent, "for the good of the cause." Sometimes Savorin was present with them, but always by request or permission; and now and then, a little crooked, hideous man, with hands like talons, and nose like a beak, sat in this circle. *His* presence was always prepared for in advance, and when *he* came Savorin was always absent.

After La Croix's illness a change was made. At first it was because he was not yet able to go out at night, and a meeting seemed necessary, that the circle met at the house of Miles La Croix. And then, after two or three meetings, held in the small inner room behind the studio, that place was fixed upon as the permanent rendezvous.

The change came about easily, and it seemed to have been the thought of Miles La Croix and none other. There was a slight show of opposition, and then a deferential yielding to "our leader" and his wishes.

This change had taken place some days before Miles La Croix's nocturnal ramble on the eve of poor Hovey's death, and Captain Fernand Makofski had been three days an inmate of the house, and had been making rapid strides into the good graces of both host and hostess, when the time for another meeting in the little room behind the studio came around. It was, in fact, on the evening of the day after Hovey's burial.

The arrival of Captain Makofski had seemed, at first, to Moina, like one more blow dealt her by an adverse fate. She was shocked at her father's hasty act of hospitality, and dreaded the constant presence of a stranger among them. And when this foreign refugee was installed in the room next that of her father, and thus placed in constant communication with him, she was reduced almost to despair.

To sit beside her father's bed as he fell asleep, holding his hand sometimes, and murmuring soothing words, had become a nightly habit. He seemed always restless now when left alone, and this hour beside his bed had come to be the only one, she mournfully told herself, when her presence seemed to be really welcome to him. Sometimes the hour was late, but he who had once been so thoughtful of her comfort, seemed not to observe this fact. He never told her nowadays not to wait up for him, as he had used to do, upon going out, and he never manifested surprise, or uttered a comment, when, after parting from Crashaw and the others at nearly midnight, he found her waiting in his chamber, or the little study opposite.

And how was this to continue with this big Russian captain separated from her father by but a thin partition, a single door?

It was her father himself who settled this troublesome question.

"I trust you are not a too light sleeper," he said at the close of their first evening together, "and that you are not nervous. My daughter has been in the habit of sitting with me in my room after I have retired for the night. I do not go to sleep readily since my late illness, and her presence seems to act as a sedative; her influence is good, is soothing. Usually we are very quiet, but sometimes, if I am especially restless, we talk a little. I trust we shall not disturb you. The walls, I know, are not thick."

Captain Fernand laughed lightly. "My kind friend," he said, "I am a heavy sleeper, and not easily wakened. If in any emergency you should see fit to call upon me in the night, I must beg you to do it without hesitation, and without thought of *my nerves*. Above all, call, or knock loudly."

Moina was secretly well pleased. She had found that, with her touch upon her father's hand as he fell asleep, she seemed to gain an easy control over his dormant senses, and when he began to murmur, as he usually did, as soon as asleep, she could easily lead his thoughts, and seldom failed to draw from him any information she wished concerning the events of the few hours previous. It was a strange, sad task that she had undertaken, and bitterly repugnant at times. But Moina La Croix was fast becoming a woman, and a woman with a heavy burden to bear, a desperate battle to fight. She was discovering within herself, unknown, undreamed of resources. She grew sometimes amazed at her own courage and fortitude.

Fernand Makofski was a man of tact, of intelligence, of wide, general knowledge, and Miles La Croix found in him a most congenial companion.

Moina, too, in spite of her reluctance to receive him, her dread lest he prove one more obstacle in her path, was drawn toward him in spite of herself. With Miles La Croix he talked, when the lead was given him, of foreign affairs, of Russian politics and nihilistic methods. He had been a traveller, and could relate much that was interesting to both father and daughter, all of which dated back several years, or before the time of his arrest and exile. He had travelled in America in his youthful days, but of this country, as it was at present, he seemed quite ignorant. So matters went smoothly on, until on the night of the meeting of the "committee" the captain found himself alone with Moina in the little drawing-room.

"Papa tells me," said she, after some desultory conversation, "that you are aware of the reason for his absence, or rather, for his seclusion, to-night."

"Yes, your father has honoured me with his confidence, Miss La Croix. He does not quite look upon me as an outsider."

"I feared it might seem rather strange to you," she faltered, and then for a moment she was silent, trifling nervously with some dainty work which lay upon her lap. During the day Moina had taken a sudden, bold resolve. She had decided to trust this man, who, stranger though he was, attracted her so strongly. He seemed so sympathetic, so chivalrous; she trusted him instinctively, and while

wondering at herself. "He is not one of them—not yet," she thought, "and if he cannot help me, at least, he will not betray me. And I will not go too far—not at first."

The silence was growing oppressive, when she suddenly lifted her eyes to his face.

"Captain Makofski," she said, her face flushing, and her voice a trifle unsteady, "will you answer a question, and will you overlook its strangeness?"

"By all means, Miss La Croix."

"You may have seen that I am singularly alone here," she hurried on. "When we came to this country, several months ago, I had not a friend here, and the two or three pleasant acquaintances I have made are now cut off from me. If I speak to you thus, it is because there is no one else, and because I believe you to be a fitting judge. Captain Makofski, answer me frankly. Do you find anything peculiar in my father's manner, or in his words?"

"Really, Miss La Croix, my acquaintance with your father has been so short——"

"True," she broke in, "but you are a man of the world, you know men. Answer me candidly."

"First, permit me to ask, is your father not his usual self?"

"His usual self! Oh, heavens! If you could have known him a year, yes, six months ago, you would not need to ask that. Wait, let me tell you something of his life—what he *was*, compared to what he is."

"One moment, pardon me. You have both told me that there are two or three others who came with you to this country, men who served the same cause that your father serves, men who knew him abroad."

"Knew him! yes, but only for a short time, less than a year, in fact."

"But this change, do I understand that it is recent?"

"Yes, it was his sickness that changed him."

"Then, may I ask, how it is that these friends of yours do not see this change? Have they not——"

She interrupted him with a strange, passionate gesture.

"Don't call these men *my* friends. Why *should* they notice this change in my father, when it serves their purpose so well, when it has made of him just a tool fitted to their hands? Ah, my poor, ill-starred father, those men sitting there to-night, calling him their 'chief,' deferring to him, and moulding him to their will, are, I believe fully, his *worst* enemies; I believe he is being made the scapegoat for their iniquitous schemes, and that some day disaster will come, and my father will be sacrificed to shield them, and cover their escape!"

If Moina had not been too much excited to notice the changes that flashed across the face of her companion as he listened, she would surely have wondered. First, was keen interest, then compassion, next a glance of actual pleasure, and, finally, a stern, roused look, and with this upon his features, he arose and stood straight before her.

"Miss La Croix," he said in a low, grave voice, "you have done

well in saying thus much, and, having said it, I beg you to speak further. Tell me of your father before this change came. Tell me what you can of these men. Do not hesitate or fear to trust me, and I swear to you, if what you say or fear is true, if your father *is* being made a tool in designing hands, you shall find a friend in me, and a friend who is not quite helpless, even here." He extended his hand, and she put her own within it; and then, sitting there face to face, she told of her father's European experiences as a "friend of the people," of his kindness, his humanity, of her own growing interest in "the cause," as it appeared to her then, of their high hopes upon coming to America, of how she had become disillusionized. But she said nothing of the black list, and of her discoveries and suspicions, nothing of her long hours beside her father's dream-tormented couch, and their attendant revelations. "Ah!" she sighed in conclusion, "What a difference! At least, it seems so to me. Socialism in Europe, even nihilism in Russia, one need not blush to be identified with; but *this*—this American socialism—American *anarchy*, it is wickedness, it is *infamy!* Here are no starving and oppressed millions, here is no exile, no Siberia, no cruel Tsar. Ah, the ingrates! they come from every land to this for shelter, for safety, for refuge from all manner of evils; and as soon as their beaten and starved bodies grow strong, they turn and smite the hand that shields them."

"Do you think, had you any reason to think, that your father, before his illness, had felt any of the dissatisfaction you have expressed?"

"He never spoke upon the subject, but his actions were eloquent—to me, who could read him so well. I believe he found their provocation small, their methods odious. Every time he met with that committee, it seemed to me his uneasiness became more apparent. He grew reserved and anxious; sometimes he had a really hunted look upon his face. He grew nervous and sleepless. Then came a night when an extra session was called, he came home late, and in the morning was ill with a fever. That was the beginning of the change."

"I see," said the captain, "*I begin to understand.*"

CHAPTER LIV.

SLAVES OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

WHILE Moina and Captain Makofski were arriving at a better understanding, Crashaw, Lugos and Passauf were assembled with Miles La Croix in the little room now devoted to the sole use of the committee. The business of the meeting was soon disposed of, it having been mutually agreed that for the *time* present, all attempts to make of Elias Lord "a thrilling example to bloated capitalists" must be abandoned, and that, for the same reasons which rendered this cessation of hostilities advisable, there should be no attempt in a new direction for a week or two at least. And then, after some letters had been read and duly commented upon, the formalities of the evening

being at an end, Mr. La Croix calmly announced the presence in his house of a new inmate.

"The name of my friend—Makofski—may not be unknown to you," he said with much dignity. "He came upon me quite as a surprise, and was, of course, not aware of my connection with this committee," bowing gravely to the three. And then he briefly sketched for their benefit the history of Captain Makofski as given more in detail by himself. "I hope," concluded he, "that, after a time, we may have him among us. He would make a most active and useful member. He has held high rank among the societies abroad, and his record," bending a calm glance upon Dr. Lugos, "is above suspicion."

"All this," replied Lugos, quite unmoved by glance or implication, "is, of course, vouched for?"

"Assuredly, and in a manner not to be disputed."

"What *I* want to know," growled Crashaw, who was looking ill-pleased, "is, how this—this Makofski found *you* out so readily?"

"That is easily explained," said the stately old man. "It was *Mr. Sharlaw* who supplied him with my address."

At the mention of Sharlaw the three men exchanged glances. "In that case," said Lugos, "I have no more to say."

"Oh, nor I," muttered Crashaw.

Passauf, as usual, said nothing.

* * * * * *

"What do you think of La Croix's new acquaintance?" asked Crashaw of Lugos, when, having shaken off Passauf, they were walking homeward together.

"Before I express an opinion I must see this Russian exile."

"Confusion! You know what I mean. Of course, you know that La Croix has it in his power to make this interloper one of us if he chooses?"

"Of course,"—coolly.

"And what then?"

Lugos lowered his voice and thrust a hand through Crashaw's arm. "Do you remember what I told you not long ago?" he began.

"About what?"

"About our success in manœuvering La Croix to our liking. I said that we should get on with him well enough so long as we encountered *no strong opposition*."

"Well!" impatiently.

"May we not find this very opposition in this stranger?"

"Do you think——"

"I think that, if she did but know it, even Miss La Croix, who has by no means a weak will of her own, could make us a good deal of trouble, and this man, if he is what La Croix pictures him, will soon fathom things; will discover his true condition."

"Well! Get to the point!"

"The point is here. This being the situation, may we not serve our own purpose best by making him one of us? He would be more than half likely to go with the majority."

"And if he should *not?*"

"If he should not," said Lugos significantly, "perhaps Tansig could show us a way out of the dilemma."

"That's a dangerous resort."

"Desperate diseases you know; but another way has just occurred to me."

"Umph, what way?"

"Did you note well an item of information kindly put forward by our 'Venerable,' to the effect that this Captain Fernand Makofski was now menaced by a Russian spy in the shape of *a woman?*"

Crashaw started. "Pshaw!" he said, "I see what you're driving at; but I tell you, you may as well put that idea out of your head. That woman is *not* a Russian spy."

"In *your* opinion—that is, we happen to differ on this subject."

"Yes," snarled Crashaw, who was in one of his worst moods, "You 'differ' because madam does not choose to receive you."

"Does 'madam' receive *you?*" asked the impassable Lugos.

"No; but *that* is for politic reasons. I have my reliable messenger."

"Yes, in Savorin, who is madly in love with madam."

"What do I care for *that?* She is not in love with *him*. Besides, I don't believe it."

"Nothing if you are wise; but you seem to forget—I have my messenger, too. Nor is this all. Madam will not receive me you say. Rest assured, my friend, that when it suits me to *be* received by madam I shall not be shut out."

Crashaw sneered and shrugged his shoulders. "Haven't we got a long way from our Russian captain?" he asked.

"Not so very far. See, now, if we find this Makofski in our way an anonymous note to madam denounces him. It must not be traced to *us*, of course. This gives us the opportunity we seek."

"Say, *you* seek."

"That *I* seek, then. If madam is true to us, the Makofski will be warned, perhaps recommended to our protection. If she is, as I suspect, an emissary of the Tsar, he will be likely to fall into some sort of trouble, perhaps be altogether removed from our path."

"Umph! Very pretty! Look here, Lugos, why do you suspect this woman of being an 'emissary?' You are Russian as well as she."

"A Pole, my good sir."

"A fiddlestick! Call yourself as many Poles as you like to others; you're as much a Russian as madam. Why may I not suspect *you* of being an emissary of the Tsar?"

Nothing seemed to ruffle the composure of Mr. Lugos. "If I knew that madam hates the Tsar and his minions as *I* hate them, I should *know* her for a nihilist," he said calmly. "As for madam, I doubt her, because she has in her veins the blood of her father. And because she was enriched and ennobled, not *born* either noble or rich, she was taken to court and made much of, and—she is a woman. But enough of this. Does Savorin keep you well informed?"

"Well enough."

"All the same, when a man is in love with a woman he is not to-

be relied upon. *I* think he is growing lukewarm. But here we are at my rooms, will you come in?"

"Yes; you have just put me in mind of something. I'll go in and we'll talk it over."

When they were closeted together, and a box of cigars had been placed before his guest, Lugos said:

"Now for your idea; it concerns Savorin, I'll wager."

"Yes; it concerns Savorin, and madam, and—others."

* * * * * *

Madam the Princess Sacha Orloff sat in her charming little salon. Her low luxurious chair was drawn close before the grate, where a brisk fire was glowing, for the day was gloomy and cheerless outside, where a heavy rain was falling. She held a gorgeous fire-screen between her face and the glow of the fire, and looked from behind it across the hearth and into the face of a visitor who sat leaning toward her, his eyes fastened upon her beautiful but discontented countenance.

"It is good to see you alone," he said at length, seeing that she made no effort to break the silence. "Shall you call Madam Petrolowski as usual as soon as I have made known my business?"

"That depends," with a half smile, "or, no, I think *not*, not to-day, in consideration of the fact that madam is not well; she never *is* well when it rains. She has 'nerves.' I was beginning to have nerves myself, I think, when you came so opportunely."

"Was it opportune?"

She shrugged her graceful shoulders. "Anything is opportune that breaks the monotony of such a day as this. You said something about business, I think?"

"Yes." And now his face clouded. "Do you ever tire of all this?"

"Tire! *I* tire of such a delightful life. How can you think it?"

"Ah, you can always mock. I wish I understood you. As it is I can only——"

"Hush," she put up a warning hand, "something uncanny is in the air, I think. I *am* nervous and cross; don't touch upon forbidden subjects. Sometimes I think you deserve to understand me better, that I will tell you that which will make me less a riddle to you. But there—not now, not to-day. Tell me your news, your business; let us be as little personal as possible; what is it?"

"Briefly, then, you are asked to pay a visit to the studio of Miles La Croix."

"I!" She threw back her head and frowned. "And why?"

"There is a stranger there, a Russian refugee. I think they want you to see him."

"Ah! Have *you* seen him?"

"I have not had that honour; but it will not be long withheld. I, too, am commissioned to cultivate his acquaintance. I may even be sent back to reside under the same roof."

She uttered a short laugh.

"Better have stayed when you were there," she said.

"Yes; as well at least. That was Crashaw. I went, as you

know, because I really pitied Miss La Croix, and wanted to be of use. And I left, as you know, because Crashaw commanded it."

"But why such haste? The man was still ill."

"Oh, yes, he was ill; but no longer delirious. What! have I not told you my ideas about Crashaw, and his designs upon Miss La Croix?"

"Designs! No. Do you mean that he——"

"Is in love with her? I hardly think Rufus Crashaw *could* love a woman; but she is an heiress. Don't misunderstand me; he does not pay court to her, but I believe he hopes to see the day when she will be driven to accept him. I don't know how he means to accomplish this, but I *do* believe that he will try it. She is terribly isolated and friendless. Crashaw is deep."

"As a well. And why do not you stand champion to Miss La Croix?"

"You are unkind," he said, with sorrowful dignity. "You *know* why I can be no more than a respectful, faithful friend to Miss La Croix. Besides, if I were to be anything more than courteous, Crashaw would withdraw me from the house altogether, and she would be quite cut off. Since the strange change in her father, her life must be dreary enough."

Her face softened, and for a moment she turned it away, then—"Tell me about this Russian," she said, abruptly. "Do you know *why* he is to be honoured with our attention?"

"I think they fear him, or are a little in doubt. Perhaps they hope you may be able to identify him. As for me, I am simply a watch-dog, to report how he gets on with La Croix, and how he is regarded by Miss La Croix. But let me tell you his story, as I know it." And he hastily sketched the story of Captain Makofski as it had been related to Crashaw and Lugos by Miles La Croix. When he had finished—

"You have forgotten to tell me his name," she said, with a strange look in her eyes.

"Pardon me. His name is Captain Fernand Makofski"

"Captain Fernand Makofski!" She was on her feet with the words, her eyes glowing with excitement, the expression of her face inscrutable.

"Do you know him?" cried Savorin.

"I have read of his arrest and imprisonment," she said hastily. "He—he was a brave man."

"Then, perhaps, your visit will have some interest for you."

"Undoubtedly." She resumed her seat, and tried to resume her indifferent manner. "And you—you are bidden to become intimate with him, Rene?"

He started and flushed at the name. "Yes," he said.

"Promise me something."

"Anything."

"Whatever you see, or learn, or think concerning this man—this Captain Makofski—promise that it shall be made known to *me* before it is reported to the central committee."

He gazed at her a moment with a troubled face. Then, "I

promise," he said, "I belong to you more than to the central committee."

"Thank you. Some day I hope you will understand all this—will love me less and pity me more." Her face was strangely softened. "Until then——" She held out her hand and smiled. He took it and kissed it humbly. "Until then, Rene, you know this, I trust you and count you my friend—my *only* friend, almost. But, Rene, what do you mean by what you said a moment since—that you belong to me more than to the committee, tell me?"

He got up and came nearer; they were both standing now. "I mean this," he said, firmly, "if it were not for you, if you were not identified with them, I would turn my back upon the society to-morrow. You know how I came into it, I think. You know, at least, that my father, who was a much-wronged man, allied himself to the revolutionists of Poland, served the cause abroad faithfully, and, dying, besought me to devote myself to it in my turn. I was a mere stripling, brought from the university to stand beside his death-bed, and his life was almost gone. I took the oath he dictated. A strange wild oath it was. Rufus Crashaw was present, and from that moment he has never lost sight of me. As soon as I left school I joined the order, and I tried honestly to serve it well; but I cannot say that my heart was in it ever."

"What! Not in those fiery speeches that made you quite famous over there?"

"Ah, that was my one little gift, and that soon wore itself threadbare. Ah, to stand night after night before those crowds, sometimes mad and unreasoning, sometimes stolid and brutal; never logical, never enlightened, never aught but selfish. It is enough to disillusionize a more enthusiastic man than myself. But just as my fate seemed hardest and blackest, Crashaw brought me to *you*. Do you know, I have sometimes thought there was design in it?"

"Upon whose part?"

"Upon *his*. Good heavens! did you think I could accuse *you?*"

"In your place many a man would do more, for I encouraged you to work on, I pressed you. I glorified the cause, and exhorted you to stand for it, to work for it. I showed you ways; I invented new arguments. Ah, you have a *right* to hate *me*——"

"Madam——"

"Wait; let us have this out; we are talking treason, both of us, and we know it. Nevertheless, we will go on. You and I were European revolutionists. You embraced it as a duty, I say that with me it was an enthusiasm. In Europe we might *still* be revolutionists, perhaps; but *here*—oh, Rene, you can no more be an American anarchist than can I. Our eyes have been opened over here. We have been behind the wings, we have seen the wheels. My friend, promise me this, that you will be guarded, that you will not let them, Crashaw and Lugos, see your dissatisfaction. Wait a little; do not make enemies of these men yet. They are tigers. But this shall end—your bondage and my false position. Only have patience a little longer. Trust me, and do not question me."

"And you will go, then, to see this stranger at La Croix's?"

"My friend, are not we pledged to the central committee? I shall obey; do you the same." He was silent, gazing at her wistfully. "I think I read your thoughts," she said. "You are wondering at my obstinacy. How many times have you asked me to see this Moina La Croix, and how often have I put you off with an evasion? *Now* I will tell you the truth. I had no reason for withholding my friendship from this lonely little friend of yours, I am *forbidden*."

"Forbidden!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; by the central committee."

"Ah!" he cried, "I begin to understand."

"And, thanks to you, so do I. But wait. Trust me, I will obey my masters; and this girl, who seems so hemmed in, shall find a friend. And now you must go, I have something to do. Tell Mr Lugos that I shall not fail him, remember."

CHAPTER LV.

STRANGE PROCEEDINGS.

Up to the time when Captain Makofski became an inmate of the La Croix house, Dr. Lugos had never visited that abode, except upon the evenings when business called them together. From the first there had been no affinity between himself and Miles La Croix, who had accepted him as a fellow-worker, and knew his value as such, but who seemed content to keep their intercourse upon a strictly business footing.

But it was necessary that they meet Captain Makofski, for La Croix was now intent upon making him one of them; and so the two, Crashaw and Lugos, presented themselves in the studio one morning, where they found La Croix nervously laying on colour, arrayed in his long black artist's gown, and Makofski lounging with a cigar between his lips and the morning paper upon his knee.

The two revolutionists meant to be very acute and to penetrate any disguise or trickery, for they were quite ready to believe that Miles La Croix had been, in some manner, victimised by this stranger, who had carried his house by storm.

Crashaw entered with his most English air, and Lugos, more suave, was yet supremely indifferent, and prepared to adopt a rather "high" tone.

But man's best laid plans fail often for lack of opportunity, and Crashaw and Lugos suddenly found the tables turned. Captain Makofski greeted them affably, it is true, and entered readily into conversation. But there was no opportunity either to overawe or to patronize Makofski. Instead, the two found themselves in the attitude they had intended for him, and while they could resent nothing, cavil at nothing. They were made to feel that to this man of many adventures they were only very little men. Petty leaders, so far from being curious or interested in their work, he took it for granted that there could be nothing in it of interest; that the anarchy of America, as compared to Russian nihilism, must be as water to wine. He was full of talk about Russia and the wrongs of

her people, and absolutely indifferent to "the wrongs of the wage-earner," the "struggle between labour and capital." Presently he turned to Lugos,

"Pardon me, doctor, *your* name is not quite unknown to me. You have good reason, I believe, for being a nihilist." In spite of his *sang froid* a dull flush mounted to the doctor's temples. "And, if I remember right, you are a compatriot."

"I am a Pole."

"Ah! Well, it's about the same. Do you find the petty struggle here, of men who want money, and men who want to keep it, worth while, after seeing the real thing, the genuine poverty, oppression, torture, starvation, exile, death, of our own country? I can see how this might attract your friend here, Mr. a——"

"Crashaw," supplied La Croix.

"Mr. Crashaw. The English are a commercial race, and he, perhaps, has never been face to face with the more vital sufferings of the European revolutionists."

"You are in error," said Crashaw, stiffly, "I have been in Russia, and am quite familiar with Russian nihilism."

"Ah! indeed?" He did not see the swift gleam in the eyes of his questioner. "It must have been during my imprisonment; a man loses ground, *when he has been in exile for years.*"

* * * * * *

"Well?" said Crashaw, in a tone of inquiry, when they were fairly out of the house and pacing the quiet street side by side.

"Well?" echoed Lugos.

"What have you found out?" sneeringly.

"Several things."

"Really? Name them."

"First, then. That is a clever fellow."

"Pshaw!"

"He has got a firm foothold in La Croix's house, and if he is inclined to make us trouble, we may look out for him. It will be no child's play."

"Bah! I know all that. But what *is* he? Is he what he seems, or—an impostor?"

"Very few of us, my dear sir, are just what we seem. He is disguised."

"Really! He *told* us that, and that he meant to remain so."

"There is nothing beyond reason in his story, and if he is not Makofski, who is he? and why does he conceal himself? One thing is certain, he is a fixture there for the present, and we will be very foolish not to keep an eye upon him. He does not seem particularly interested in *us*."

"No."

"Still, all that might be feigned. One thought occurs to me. You know Sharlaw better than I do."

"Probably," dryly.

"Do you think he has perfect confidence in *you*."

Crashaw turned upon him with an oath. "What do you mean?" he growled.

"Just what I say. It has occurred to me, more than once, that Sharlaw, if he is the acute fellow he is said to be, may have sent some one here, on the quiet, to see how we were running things."

"Pshaw!" sniffed Crashaw; but immediately he added, "And do you think this fellow may be a spy?"

"It is possible."

"We might write to Sharlaw."

"The very worst thing we could do. If he *has* sent the man, it would be a blunder. If he is not what he pretends, or *whoever* he is, depend upon it, that man is too clever to have made use of Sharlaw's name without authority for the same."

Crashaw was silent for some moments.

"You spoke to him of bringing a friend, a compatriot, to see him," he said, presently. "Did you mean—the Princess?"

"Yes. Since madam consents so readily to go, I propose to present her myself; in this way I insure their meeting and witness it. Do you see any objection to the plan?"

"No; I think it's good."

A look that was half smile, half sneer, crossed the face of Lugos.

"I knew it would suit *you*," he said; "I shall make the experiment to-morrow."

* * * * * *

While the two revolutionists were thus cheering each other, Princess Sacha entered Madeline's boudoir with the quick graceful movement peculiar to her in moments of haste, and paused directly before the low chair, where Madeline reclined with a book in her hand.

"Do not rise, *ma belle*, I have only a moment to stay, only a word to speak. I have come to beg a favour." She dropped down upon an ottoman close beside Madeline, and hurried on. "I am sure you will grant it, for you are always ready to do good. It's a little unusual, the thing I am asking of you, but it's a *kind* thing, and it *must* be right, therefore."

"If it's right and kind," smiled Madeline, "we won't consult *all* the proprieties."

"Ah! thank you! Now I can get on bravely. There is in this city a family in whom one of my friends is much interested; he met them, I believe, in coming to this country. The father is strange and something of a hermit, and the daughter, my friend tells me, she is beautiful and good, and is singularly alone. He has asked me more than once to see her, to try and be kind to her. But—I have to consult a little the wishes, the prejudices, of another."

"I understand," said Madeline, aloud. To herself, she said, "She wishes me to think that she means her supposed mother; *I know better*."

"To-day I have learned that these people have a guest — a Russian, and a man whose name leads us to think he may be—one whom we used to be much interested in; and, to make my story short, I am permitted to go *now* where I was forbidden before, in the hope of finding a compatriot. But—I must not be too kind to the

young lady, should I chance to see her. Ah!" smiling up into Madeline's face, "it is a terrible thing to be an aristocrat with prejudices. *Now*, will you help me?"

"You have not told me in what way."

"Why, thus: we will drive there together, you and I; I will ask for the Russian guest, and while I am paying my respects to him, *you*, naturally, would be left to the courtesies of this young girl, would you not?"

"Perhaps."

"At any rate, I can see no better plan; and I *am* anxious to know this girl, to help her if I can. She is motherless, and has had much trouble, I am told."

Madeline reflected. What was the Princess Sacha attempting? why did she wish her company? For, of course, she did not for a moment believe this pretty version of the pretty story. Then she remembered a fragment of Drexel's advice concerning the Princess: "See as much of her as you can; above all, try and learn who are her visitors, *and whom she visits*."

"I will go," she said.

"Good; then it shall be at once—that is, to-day."

At this moment Madeline's maid appeared in the doorway; someone was waiting for the Princess Sacha.

It was Rene Savorin whom she found awaiting her; he held a letter in his hand. "Honours are heaped upon me!" he said, bitterly; "to-day I am made a messenger. *You* know why I accepted the dignity."

"Perfectly, my poor Rene; but, patience, and give me the letter."

"I hope I have brought you nothing unpleasant," he said, as she took it from his hand."

She opened it hastily, and read it, standing opposite him. Then her face clouded.

"Listen," she said, angrily, "and judge." She told him briefly of the plan she had formed for outwitting Crashaw and Lugos, by introducing Madeline into the La Croix's house, and letting *her* bring about future meetings with Moina. Savorin had already heard of Sacha's acquaintance with "the beautiful American," as she had called her; but he knew her by no other name.

"All was arranged," finished Sacha, "and now comes *this!*" and she struck the letter smartly with one little hand; "hear it:"

"MADAM,—It has been thought best that we go together (you and I) to see the Russian refugee *calling himself* Makofski. I have hoped that you might chance to have seen this man, as he has been in the army (if he is not an impostor), and posted, he tells us, for some time at Odessa, as well as at the capital. Should you recognize him you will be pleased to signify the same to me at once. You will find me waiting for you *promptly* at four p.m. at the corner of the small oblong park less than two blocks from La Croix's house *Please be punctual.*

"Yours respectfully,

"LUGOS."

"*By order of Committee.*"

She looked up, her eyes flaming.

"The coward!" she cried, "the wretch! To dare this impertinence! and then to cloak it under the name of the committee. And I am to go with *him* to identify or—tell me," she caught his arm suddenly; "*why* are they so anxious about this man?"

"I can only say what I said yesterday: they fear him, I verily believe; but why——"

"Never mind why! I will go; tell Dr. Lugos I will be prompt at the rendezvous."

"There is another amendment to the programme. They want *me* to be there also. *I* am to call upon Miss La Croix."

"I see! That is to prevent *me* from encountering her."

"Precisely. I am to be received in the drawing-room, you in the studio."

"Very good." Sacha's cheeks were burning hotly. "Let it be so, only if someone else appears in the drawing-room, you will give the two ladies all possible chance to exchange a few words?"

"I will do whatever you wish."

* * * * * *

When Savorin had taken his leave the Princess Sacha forced her countenance into composure and went back to Madeline.

"It is odious!" she began, in her pretty abrupt fashion; "all my plans are spoiled, unless you will consent to do a very quixotic thing. See, I have just received a note, which informs me that *another* compatriot, a physician, will visit me to-day, and I shall have to take him to see this Russian officer, instead of going with you. We are as clannish as Jews, you see. And now, *how* shall we manage? I have set my heart on your meeting this Moina La Croix?"

"Whom?"

"Miss La Croix—Moina La Croix."

"And it is *she*, then, who is so alone? whose father is a recluse, and——" she checked herself, and moderated her tone. "Pardon my surprise, but I think there can hardly be two Moina La Croix; and I made the acquaintance of Moina La Croix and her father *en route* from Europe to America, on ship-board."

"And you *know* her?"

"We became quite friends, but of late have seen little of each other."

"Do you object to visit her?"

"By no means; I will go at any time."

"At four o'clock, then. Shall you go alone?"

"I shall take my maid."

"Ah; then all is arranged."

* * * * * *

At half-past three Madeline's carriage was at the door, and she was drawing on her gloves, when a note was put into her hand. She recognized Drexel's writing, and tossing aside the gloves, opened it, and read with amazement these words:

"Please call, upon some pretext, and *as soon as possible*, upon Miss La Croix. Be kind to her, she needs a friend; and, above all, contrive in some manner to see *Mr. La Croix*. *Ask* for him, if you

must. Stay to luncheon—anything, so that you see him. And then observe him closely. Note if you find him the same as you knew him first, and write me the result of your observations *at once*. Destroy when read.

"Yours,

"HURST."

And now it is Madeline's turn to be agitated. She paces up and down the room with the note crumpled between her fingers. "What farce is this?" she murmurs, "or, perhaps, what tragedy? What can it mean? The plot thickens, indeed! *Why* do these two, who seem engaged in some nameless strife, unite in wishing this one thing? Strange, very strange!"

CHAPTER LVI.

TOO COMPLICATED.

RENE SAVORIN, up to the time of his arrival in America, had, in accordance with the obligation taken upon himself in entering the "circle" to which he belonged, always obeyed the orders of the "committee" in charge, without question or reluctance, but his work had not been repulsive there, it had not outraged his finer feelings. He had been one of the mouthpieces of the order, and little but words had been required of him. In New York, things began as at first, but gradually there came a change. He became less an orator, and more, to use one of his own phrases, "a utility person." Instead of addressing meetings, he was sent now and then to listen; he found himself collecting data, and statistics, learning the strength of this band and that, finding out the leaders of the different orders; not the officers only, but the men who were foremost in time of strife, the stirers-up of strikes and riots. He was sent to the haunts of the socialists, the nihilists, the disaffected, by whatever name they chose to call themselves. And, gradually, he had come to look upon his work from a new point of view, and a most unsatisfactory one. It was in one of these saloon visits that he had early made the acquaintance of Kenneth Hosmer, who had chanced to render him some slight service, and the two had struck fire at once. They were well mated; Savorin lost no time in presenting Hosmer to Crashaw, and he was taken once to the house of Miles La Croix, but the visit was not repeated, and Crashaw listened coldly to Savorin's eulogies, and turned a deaf ear to his proposals to take Hosmer in and make him one of them.

"It won't do," Crashaw had said, "at least, not yet; we can't afford to take in any of these Americans with their Western notions, at least, not until they've been well tested, and *our* footing here is firmer. Keep an eye on the fellow as much as you like, use him if you can. But *be careful*, tell him nothing, learn all you can."

He was taken at his word. Savorin said no more about Hosmer, but the acquaintance grew, and as each learned more of the cause they had hastily espoused, they compared notes and experiences freely, and this, as the end proved, was good for both, each helped the other toward the solution of his individual riddle.

It was after a long and cheering talk with Kenneth that Savorin took his way, at four o'clock, toward the La Croix abode. He had decided that, in order to assist Sacha in gaining her point, he would do well to arrive late, and he loitered about, not too far away, until he saw Madeline's carriage draw up before the door, and now, being near enough to see her quite clearly, he recognized with much amazement, the young lady he had met on ship-board, and whom he had lost sight of since. In an instant his decision was taken, he waited long enough to feel tolerably sure that all had gone well, and that Madeline had been received, and then he walked to the nearest corner, where he found and entered a cab, just as the carriage of the Princess Sacha Orloff, with the lady and Lugos visible within, dashed past and up to the La Croix's door.

Then he drove at once to Crashaw's rooms.

"What's this!" cried out that individual seeing his cool entry. "Why are you not at your post?"

"Simply because I did not choose to run any risk. Miss La Croix is safely diverted, she has a visitor who might have thought my appearance strange." And he told him of Madeline's visit and reminded him of where they had met, omitting, however, the fact that this visit of Miss Payne's was due to the influence of the Princess Sacha.

"So," said Crashaw, knitting his brows, "*that* acquaintance has been kept up! it must not go on, it must be nipped in the bud."

"Really! Then I must beg you to do the nipping. I believed myself acting for the best interests of all, by retiring as I did."

"Oh, you were *right* enough. I am not criticising your course, on the whole, it was for the best. As for this new acquaintance, I will attend to that, *I* will break that off."

"I hope you see your way?" said Savorin, coldly.

"I do, I see it clearly. Give yourself no trouble about that."

Savorin said no more, he was thinking of Madeline Payne, as he remembered her during the pleasant days of that ocean voyage, and asking himself if, with Madeline Payne and the Princess Sacha against him, Crashaw would find his task as easy as he seemed to anticipate.

* * * * * *

Meantime, Moina had received her friend with a mixture of pleasure and reserve that was at once noticed by Madeline. She noted, too, the new look in the girl's face, and said to herself "Drexel was right, she has had trouble, has suffered, and it has made her stronger, it has made her a *woman*."

There was of necessity much of reserve upon the part of each, and yet it was evident that they were cordially glad of this meeting. Moina told of her father's long illness which, she said, had left him "sadly changed," and Madeline gave a modified version of Mr. Lord's "sickness," and of Mrs. Ralston's "nerves," and then told of her own removal to the "Oriental." When this subject was exhausted, Madeline asked, with her most cordial smile, if she might not pay her respects to Mr. La Croix.

"I believe there are some people with papa," said Moina with

indifference. "We have a guest at present, but, by-the-bye, I think the callers are for Captain Fernand quite as much as for papa. I will ask him to come to us," and she rang for Margot, and sent her with a request that her father would give her a few moments of his time. She did not give Madeline's name.

* * * * * *

If Captain Makofski had felt any uneasiness as to the outcome of the expected visit from Dr. Lugos and "a fair compatriot"—for Lugos had given her no other title in appointing their meeting—it had not been apparent, when the Princess Sacha, closely followed by Lugos, swept into the studio. By her own request she was presented simply as Madam Orloff.

His greeting was calmly respectful; and hers, after a moment's survey of him, was smilingly cordial, as she went toward him and put out her hand. When she had been presented to Miles La Croix, and some general civilities has been exchanged, she turned again to Captain Fernand.

"Captain," she began, "I beg you to assist my memory. Your face troubles me. Have we somehow met before?"

"The face of the Princess Orloff is as familiar to me," he said gallantly, "as if it had been but days, instead of years, since it flashed past me in the carriage of the Prince Vladimer Orloff. Madam the Princess was still a bride, and the toast and envy of half the capital when I was, unfortunately, banished."

"Ah!" she was looking at him fixedly; "then you were not presented to me? I had a fancy that you might have been. I *must* have seen your face."

"That is more than possible; you might have chanced to glance at me when on review, or some time at the palace; I was much on duty there. But a presentation to Madam the Princess—that would have been an honour not to be forgotten."

"Yes", she said, as if quite satisfied with this explanation. "That is it, of course. We have met at the palace." And then she began to talk of Russia, of nihilism, and she let him see, without reserve, how much she was interested in the cause for which he had suffered. They talked of Odessa and St. Petersburg, of Siberia and the exile system; even of Prince Vladimer Orloff, and his illness and death. And on all topics Captain Makofski met her half-way. The conversation was confined almost exclusively to these two. Miles La Croix retired quite within himself, and Lugos was almost ignored when he made any attempt to take a part in the conversation.

Princess Sacha seemed quite absorbed in this entertaining captain. She glowed and sparkled and smiled, and her talk flowed crisp and bright, with abundance of animated gesture.

"One would think she was trying to fascinate him," thought Lugos, not too well pleased. Captain Makofski was certainly a social success.

When Moina's messenger came, it was Princess Sacha who urged La Croix to go.

"Go; I beg of you, sir," she said eagerly, "I regret that I am unable to pay my respects to your charming daughter in person. But

present them to her, I beg, and say that at another time I hope to know her. See, I have only a few moments more for Captain Makofski, and then—other engagements call. Go, my dear sir. No excuse—none."

* * * * * *

When La Croix first stood in Madeline's presence, a look of doubt and perplexity rested for a moment upon his face, then it cleared, and his greeting was like that of the old Miles La Croix. Moina's heart bounded as she noted it; but the bitter moment passed, and before he had been long in her presence, Madeline saw the change. What had been gravity was now nervous preoccupation. The fine eyes had grown restless, the strong face had changed woefully. He spent an unquiet ten minutes with Moina and Madeline, and then went back to the studio. Madeline did not seek to detain him. That ten minutes had been quite enough.

As Madeline was about to go, she stood with Moina just within the open drawing-room door to say the usual few more parting words. Standing thus, she heard another door unclose, and then she stood transfixed, as the sound of a masculine voice, uttering farewell courtesies, fell upon her ear. Fortunately, Moina did not notice her start, and she recovered herself quickly.

"Papa's guests are going, too," said Moina. "Will you wait, or——"

"I will go," said Madeline, acting upon a sudden impulse. And she swept out and down toward the group just emerging from the studio.

With a bow and smile for Mr. La Croix, a passing glance for Sacha, and another, swift and keen, that rested first upon the swarthy Lugos, standing beside the Princess, and last, and longest, upon the tall man with the bearded face and thick, auburn hair, who stood within the doorway, uttering his good-byes to Sacha, and who bent his head as she passed.

Margot and her maid were in the little ante-room, near the street entrance, and Madeline was in her carriage and rolling away before the Princess had reached the street.

"Ah!" murmured Madeline, as she leaned back among her cushions, "I have made a discovery!"

A moment later, Lugos, sitting opposite the Princess, and being whirled along close behind Madeline's carriage, said,

"Well, it seems, then, that Captain Makofski is *not* an impostor."

"Did you hope to find him one?" she asked sharply.

He smiled and turned his glance streetward. "Whatever I hoped," he said, "I am *now* quite satisfied."

She was silent a moment. Then, in a more affable tone, "Shall you ask him to join you?" she asked.

"I hardly know as yet—perhaps."

"You say he does not go out at all?"

"That is what he says; at least, he only strolls about a little, just for his health, you know—after dark."

Again she seemed thoughtful. "I should like to meet him again," she said.

"Then we must find you another opportunity."

"Thank you." He was watching her furtively, and she lowered her long lashes, and tried to keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

* * * * * *

When he was again alone with Crashaw, Lugos said, after giving a full report of the interview between Makofski and the Princess, "One thing is clear to my mind; it is of Princess Sacha that the captain spoke, when he mentioned a woman whom he might have cause to fear. There is no other possible. Now, does he know that this woman *is* the Princess?"

"Can't say."

"Well, if he is what he pretends, and is well informed about the woman, then I am right and you wrong, and the Princess *is* a traitor. I am puzzled, I confess it. I don't understand either of them. But where was Savorin? He was not there, and someone else was."

"Yes, I know;" whereupon Crashaw, in his turn, explained Savorin's absence.

"I think for once the fellow acted judiciously," he concluded. "If the lady had seen him on ship-board he did well not to seem to be too familiar there."

"Who did you say this young woman is?"

"A Miss Madeline Payne. By-the-bye, Savorin tells me that she is living at the "Oriental" and has become quite well acquainted with the Princess."

"Oh!"

"Is there anything so strange in that?"

"Well, no; but look here. We met, all of us, as we were taking leave, and the two women passed each other *as strangers*. I don't like this. There are too many complications."

"Well, never mind the women, but let's get back to our Russian captain. We must fix his position, and we can't do it too soon."

"Where he is concerned," said Lugos, grimly, "we can do but one of two things. *Either he must be got rid of before we begin to act again, or he must become one of us.*"

CHAPTER LVII.

A NEW ALLY.

NEITHER Madeline nor the Princess were inclined for conversation upon their return—nor in a mood to compare notes.

Both were preoccupied, and the Princess, who had put down her passenger just where she took him up, and arrived but a moment later than Madeline, sent word that she would come to her in an hour.

Glad of this respite, Madeline sat down to think, and to write to Drexel. Her active mind was in a tumult. The day had brought her some odd surprises. More than ever she realized the complications of

of her surroundings and the magnitude of the mystery of which she was now a part. More than ever she studied the Princess Sacha with wonder and doubt. Who was the strange man with the dark foreign face, and where did the Princess take him up? That he was not a visitor at the hotel she was very sure. And *what* an unprepossessing face!

Finally, she began a letter to Drexel, telling him the story of the entire day. Of the Princess Sacha's appeal on behalf of Moina La Croix, of the sudden change in the programme, and of her visit to Moina, already determined upon when she had received his note. "Moina La Croix," she wrote, "is looking sad and anxious; evidently she is deeply troubled, but the change in her father might account for all that, for he is changed—sadly, strangely, mentally and physically—he is a different man. Not at all the gentle, courtly, gravely-serious old man I knew on board the steamer. Something has gone out of his face. He is shattered, broken—*the best part of the man seems dead.*"

When all was said that concerned Moina and Miles La Croix she hesitated a moment, the pen poised above the sheet, and a gleam of mischief in her eyes. "Shall I?" she mused, "or shall I be mute?" then the smile faded. "At present I will be blind," she said, and wrote at the end of her letter:—

"The La Croix have a guest, as you know from the above; I had a glimpse of him in going out. He is said *by the Princess* to be *a Russian.*"

This done, she called her maid. Minna was not the regulation Frenchwoman, but a small, trim, German girl, with keen bird-like brown eyes, and a plain, shrewd face. An ideal maid, faithful, discreet, and devoted to her mistress.

"Minna," began Madeline, "did you see the gentleman who called at the La Croix house with Madam La Princess?"

"Yes, my fraulein."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"I? Ah! no——"

"Listen. I am surprised that this man, who must be a friend of the Princess's, has never been seen here. You see the callers of madam sometimes, do you not?"

"Yes, fraulein." The girl came a step nearer. "And now, may I say something that I might have said before, if I had thought it would—interest the fraulein?"

"You must understand, Minna, that this foreign lady is not very well known to me. I am taking her upon trust; I rely upon your discretion in saying this to you. I am troubled by the appearance of this dark man. I want to know if he is likely to be met in the rooms of madam. I think I should not care to meet him. I am going to ask you to observe, as you can, and to tell me if you see this dark man here; you understand?"

"My mistress does not wish to be forced to know this man, to meet him, perhaps, in the salon of the Princess. I saw all. Madam did *not* receive this man here; she must, then, have met him elsewhere—a rendezvous, perhaps. May I be permitted—I have

been in the service of many ladies, even at my age ; I have learned a little, and I have had doubts of this madam. If I might speak freely——"

"Go on, then."

"Madam has one caller who is known to my fraulein."

"Ah!"

"Yes. It is the young French gentleman with the dark eyes who came upon the ship."

"M. Rene Savorin?"

'The same, my fraulein. He comes to see Madam the Princess often. He is madam's lover——"

"Be careful, Minna!"

"It was the maid of madam who told me, fraulein. She is very observing, that Frenchwoman ; I could tell you many things—ah! these foreign ladies have strange ways."

"That will do, Minna. Perhaps we will talk of this again. If you chance to see this dark man, or M. Savorin, enter the rooms of the Princess, please tell me at—at once."

From the moment of receiving this charge Madam the Princess Orloff had another watcher, alert, discreet, adroit. Minna was a host in herself.

Madam Sacha presented herself in Madeline's boudoir in due time, and thanked the latter warmly and in the prettiest of phrases for her "goodness in calling upon Miss La Croix," while she regretted the foolish prejudice which compelled her to remain aloof. But she did not follow up the subject and withdrew soon.

Madeline dined alone and late, and when she entered her boudoir immediately after, she found Minna awaiting her, bright-eyed and eager.

"It has happened already, my fraulein," she began, "the young Frenchman has been in the rooms of the Princess for half-an-hour."

"Ah!" Madeline reflected a moment, then, taking a sudden resolution, she said, "Go to the Princess, Minna, and say to her, with my compliments, that if she is disengaged for the evening, I will join her, unless she will kindly come to me here."

"Yes, fraulein."

Minna was back in a few moments, with her quiet step and demure manner.

"Madam the Princess begs to be excused," she said, "she is going out this evening," and then, in a more confidential tone, she added, "I entered as usual, fraulein, for the door of the ante-room was not locked. Before I was fairly in, I heard madam's voice, she was just inside the curtain, with the young gentleman, who must have been taking his leave. 'Say to him that I will come,' she was saying, 'but this must not be repeated, it is not safe. I will not risk it. I will come to-morrow, at ten o'clock. I will come alone. Is it far?' Then I heard him say, 'No, you can walk easily, but you will let me go with you?' 'No,' she said, 'I will go alone.' I dared not listen any more, I could see the curtain shake as if she were about to draw it back. I made a sound with the door as if I had just

opened it, and I called softly, 'Justine, Justine.' Madam was before me in a moment, looking angry and startled. I gave her your message, and came away."

"And she said she was going out?"

"Yes, fraulein."

Madeline looked thoughtful. "You may go, Minna," she said.

Minna withdrew, but in a few moments was back again.

"Well, Minna?"

Minna seemed a little embarrassed, she fidgeted nervously as she proffered her request. "Would the fraulein permit her to go out? If she did not need her, of course—she had an errand, and she would come back soon. It was early and she was not afraid."

Madeline eyed her keenly, and a smile curved the corners of her mouth. For a moment it seemed that she was about to refuse; but at last she said, "I shall not need you for an hour or more. You may go."

Ten minutes later, a lady dressed in dark plain garments and wearing a drooping hat, which shaded and half-concealed her features, emerged from a private door, used only by the resident patrons of the "Oriental," and walked briskly eastward.

Half a block away, a second female figure overtook her and in passing turned briskly, saying, "Is it *you*, Madam the Princess, and alone! Ah!"

It was in truth the Princess Sacha, and starting slightly, she halted and answered quietly enough,

"Why, Minna, you startled me. Yes, it is I; I wanted to come out, and Justine has a headache. I am only going to post some letters and—and by that time—the time I am back, my carriage will be ready. I am going out, you know."

"To post some letters? Then I may see madam safe to the letter-box and back, may I not? I am going there, too."

The Princess, who had started forward, stopped again, and after a second of silence, laughed off lightly.

"I brought out my letters, Minna, because I wanted to *walk*, otherwise they might have been sent from the house. Do you always post your letters outside?"

"Nearly always, Madam the Princess. I have heard it said that that they go quicker so, and that the further 'down-town' they are put into the boxes, the earlier they are taken to the place—the post, and sent on their way."

Princess Sacha started forward. "Come then, Minna," she said, "since you go my way, I am glad of your company."

They went on together for a half a block in silence. Then the lady said,

"How far down do you go, Minna, when you want your letters to go in haste?"

"Oh, that depends, madam. Sometimes I go many blocks. The servants have told me where the post office is, and I go near to that. Would madam like her letters to go soon?"

The Princess paused again.

"Y—yes," she said, slowly, "only I did not mean to walk so far.

Perhaps—Minna, suppose *you* take the letters, mine and yours, and post them where they will go quickest. I can then walk back, after going a little farther ; it is almost time for my carriage."

"Certainly, madam, I am not afraid, and I know where to go."

She took the two letters which the Princess held out to her, and when they had gone a block further eastward, the lady said,

"I think I will turn back now. Be careful, Minna, and post them safely. You can cross now with ease. I thank you, Minna."

She stood for a moment watching the girl, as she made her way with quick sure steps over the street, and then turned back, retracing her steps for half a block, only to turn again, and keeping carefully in the rear of some pedestrians, went back to the corner where they had parted company.

Here she paused, looked quickly about her and then turned to the right, moving briskly, like one accustomed to the route.

But again, it was only for a little way. At the second corner a small man appeared suddenly at her side and made the crossing with her, silently proffering his assistance where the crowd was thickest, which she as silently accepted.

When they had reached the further side, she took her hand from his arm, and they both slackened their pace.

"Well," she said, under her breath.

"There is much to say," began the man, respectfully. "I have heard from—Sharlaw." His tone had been low from the first word, but, as he uttered this name, he glanced about him and dropped his voice yet lower. "He is at a loss in this matter. He was surprised to learn that the man Lugos has been given so high a place here. It is by no authority of his. He will make further investigations, and if the man is dangerous, if what you say, or fear, proves true," again he paused and glanced about him, "there is but one way, he says."

Under her drooping hat her eyes gleamed, and her lips were tightly compressed. "And that?" she whispered.

"The last resort. And—it will rest in your hands."

"In *mine!*"

"Yes, in yours to command, in mine, perhaps, to execute. To be quite safe and ready for emergencies, he has sent you the talisman. Here it is."

She shivered, and drew a little away from him as, putting a hand inside the breast of his coat he withdrew a small package, and proffered it to her.

"Already?" she said, and took it with hesitating touch.

"It is the only way," he said. "You realize our position, yours as well as mine. Without that *his* power is beyond yours ; with it——"

"With it, it may be a drawn game, a battle." She supplemented, "*I* am not afraid." She held the packet firmly now, and threw back her head.

"Nor I, I hope." The man's tone was strangely even and emotionless.

"I was thinking of the others, not of you, my friend," she said. "But go on ; what else have you to tell?"

"They are much troubled to account for your presence in this country."

"I know that."

"Do you know that they have written to European correspondents to learn, if possible, what your mission here *really is?*"

"No. Have they done that?"

"Yes, and more and worse. They profess to fear you may be, after all, in the service of the Russian police."

"Oh!" She stifled a mocking laugh. "I wonder what they would think your mission might be if they knew—you were here?"

"Luckily for me they do *not* know that I am here. I am supposed to be a limping fixture in Thames Street."

They walked on in silence for a moment, then, "Is that all from abroad?" she asked.

"Not quite. Since they have learned over there that Crashaw, who was sent here as the head of the circle, or our half of it, has abdicated in favour of Miles La Croix, who is accredited as *second* on the home roll, it has set them to thinking. They have made some discoveries which will be communicated to us duly. Crashaw, you know, was appointed one of the trustees of the funds collected here."

"Yes."

"They are investigating, I think, in that direction."

"Ah!" It was evident from her tone that this item of information was of slight interest. Suddenly she said, "Did you ever hear of one Fernand Makofski, Disset?"

The man started. "The name is familiar," he said.

"It is the name of a Russian officer exiled shortly after the killing of the Tsar. He is said to have escaped and to be in the house of—Miles La Croix. Are you sure you do not know him?"

"Quite sure."

"I must see this man, and I want you to be my messenger. I have here a letter, it must be delivered this evening, if possible. You need only ask for him, and if he does not choose to appear, leave it in the hands of the maid-servant, saying that you will await an answer."

"And—how will you get the answer, madam?"

"Oh, I shall not ask you to bring it. It will be quite safe to trust it to a messenger. Only I must have it early. You will go?"

"I am yours to command, madam."

"Very good, and thank you. We will turn here, Disset. You may walk with me to the next street. I am near my hotel. When shall I meet you next? I am growing quite familiar with the city."

"And I," he said. "Let our next meeting be by day. You will find the place set down on this card. We shall be quite secure there."

"Very well. That was a wise thought of yours, Disset, to meet at stated times, and never twice in the same place."

"I cannot be too thoughtful for you, madam," he said.

A moment later they were at the street corner, and both halted.

"Good-night, Disset."

"Good-night, madam." The words come slowly, and the two stood for a moment, hesitating, as if each had a word more which it was hard to utter. She moved away a pace, and then came nearer.

"Disset—there is a little—a *little* hope. I am promised some news—soon." And now she put out her hand.

"God grant it!" he said, bending over it. Then suddenly it was withdrawn. "Good-night," she whispered over her shoulder, and was gone, while he stood gazing after her flitting figure until it was lost among the passers-by.

"A daring woman," he muttered as he turned away, "and a determined." Then, shaking his head slowly, "How will it end, I wonder? How will it end?"

* * * * * *

An hour after leaving Madeline's presence, Minna was back again. She entered the boudoir noiselessly, and came and stood directly before her mistress.

"May I tell the fraulein something?"

"Go on, Minna."

"As I went out I overtook a lady who was walking not very fast. This was half a block away, fraulein."

"Yes?"

"I passed her, and, look—it was Madam the Princess." Here the girl paused, and looked her mistress full in the face. "Shall I go on, fraulein?"

For a moment Madeline returned the gaze calmly, and a trifle coldly. Then she said, "Go on, Minna."

Whereupon Minna related with minuteness her interviews with the Princess up to the point where the letters were put into her hand, and the two had parted at the street corner. Here she paused again, and as Madeline remained silently awaiting her next word, she finally asked,

"What would you have had me do next, fraulein?"

"What *did* you do, Minna? Come, I understand you, you were acting to please me. Tell me how it ended, and then we will understand each other."

"I took the letters, fraulein, and went across the street. It was not so light on that side, and after I had walked a few steps, I turned back and stood in the shadow of a great portico. Madam had been looking after me, too, it would seem, for I saw her in the place where I had left her. But at that moment she turned and went back, and I crossed again and was walking quickly, trying to keep her in sight, for I knew she had meant to shake me off, when, quick as that," illustrating by a swift gesture, "she turned again, and came fast toward me. I could do nothing then but go close to the wall and stand there, and she passed without seeing me. She went back to the same corner, and I followed. Then she turned, going north, and a little further on a man joined her. Ah, fraulein, if you could have seen *him!* He was worse than the dark one; that is—I could not see his face, being all the time behind them, but he was not a gentle-

man at all. A little man, who walked awkwardly, and was dressed like a tradesman. She took his arm, and they walked slowly, seeming to talk together earnestly. Of course, I could not come too near, and when they separated, I saw Madam the Princess come back here, her carriage was at the door and she got into it at once."

"And you, Minna?"

"Perhaps my kind fraulein will say I have done wrong. I meant it well; I came up to my room, not having either pencil or paper with me, and I wrote down the names that were upon madam's two letters, then I went out and posted them. Here are the names upon the two letters. I wrote them very carefully." She held out a half-sheet of note-paper, upon which was written two addresses, copied in Minna's prim hand, just as they had stood upon the two envelopes.

The first was a Russian address. And Madeline rightly guessed it to be that of a steward, or business agent.

The second name was that of *Rufus Crashaw.* Here was a discovery indeed. Madeline pondered over it so long that Minna at last said, deprecatingly, "Have I done wrong, my fraulein?"

Madeline put down the slip of paper.

"We will not go into the right and wrong of your adventure, Minna. What you have done would be wrong in nine cases out of ten. But, at least, you have not displeased me. Listen, I have a strong reason for wishing to know as much as I can of this lady, the Princess Orloff. My reason is an honest one, and it concerns another more than it does myself. I think I need not tell you that mere idle curiosity has nothing to do with all this, that my reasons are grave ones. And this is all I *can* tell you, Minna. If I did not know that I could trust you, I should not say this, nor allow you to do as you have done. But I tell you now, frankly, that you have done me a service."

"And may I still serve in the same way? I am sure I can help my fraulein, and since it is for a good reason—ah, listen," she went on, eagerly, "I have served you, and well, I hope, for nearly three years; but before then I was much abroad, I saw much of strange doings among the good people. When I came to you, fraulein, I saw very soon that I had now a mistress who is a true lady, who lived all her life in the open day. All has been right, all true. Now, when we meet this Madam the Princess, what do I see? Ah, such a *difference!* I see some things, and I hear more from the Frenchwoman. I could tell my fraulein much, I could tell her——"

But Madeline interrupted her by a gesture.

"Not now, Minna," she said, "we will talk of this again, I want be alone now."

When she was alone, she sat down to her desk again, and began to write, smiling now and then at the thought of Minna's acuteness, and knowing that, for the rest of the battle, she had a staunch ally close at hand.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A HEART'S AWAKENING.

CAPTAIN FERNAND received the summons of the Princess Sacha from the hand of Margot while he sat in the study with Miles La Croix, read it with an impassable face, and asked permission to write a reply then and there. It was an odd reply, containing neither date, address, nor signature, and it did not take long to write it.

Selecting a small sheet of note-paper from the well-stocked desk, the captain wrote the one word, "*yes*," in neat Roman letters, like smoothest print. He did not seek to see the messenger, but when Margot had carried away his brief reply, he drew his chair close to that of Miles La Croix, and silently placed the letter of the Princess before him. La Croix took it up, adjusted his spectacles, and read it without a word. It was written in a causticly polite strain.

"Madam the Princess was not at all satisfied with her meeting with Captain Makofski. Naturally, it was something rare to meet a countryman in America, and one, too, who came from her own city, who knew those whom *she* knew. She had many things to ask of him. Doubtless, he could tell her much that was interesting. Would he come to her at the earliest moment possible? He *must* not refuse her this. In Russia, it would have been hers to command, and his to obey. She should *consider herself in Russia*, and *command* his presence in her salon at eight o'clock of the following evening."

Thus ran the letter, and when he had read it thus far, Miles La Croix put it down, with a frown upon his face.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"She commands, you see, and has made it very easy for me to accept—to *obey*, and to signify my obedience," he waved his hand toward the letter, and La Croix took it up again.

There was a postscript as follows :—

"Pray waste no words in accepting or refusing. Write, and send by my messenger, *one word*, yes or no."

"I wrote the one word—yes," said the captain, as La Croix again put down the letter.

The frown still rested upon the old man's face.

"That woman," he said, slowly, "if I have understood aright, is the one whom you may have reason to fear."

"Yes."

"And yet you go?"

"It is my wisest course, I am sure, and my safest. That letter, as you see, is a *command*, it carries an undercurrent of meaning. Still, pardon me, I *have* been too hasty. If I pay this visit, and if evil comes of it, it will be most embarrassing to you. I should have consulted you." He got up and paced about the room as if mentally disturbed.

"You should not go," said La Croix, with decision.

"You think so?"

"Yes."

Makofski resumed his seat near the old man, whose eyes were glittering, while his cheeks glowed with excitement.

"I have written, too hastily perhaps, that I would come. I can recall that assent, but it will entail a penalty. A penalty I would risk much to avoid."

"What penalty?"

"The loss of your society, sir. Banishment from your roof. If Madam Orloff is what I fear, I cannot refuse to obey her, and remain here. That would be to subject you to danger. I should be watched and you do not want your house spied upon I take it; it would be ruinous for you. May I speak very plainly without fear of giving you offence?"

"Go on."

"Madam Orloff, whom I had looked upon as a possible enemy, is brought to see me by your friends, Lugos and Crashaw, in the character of a revolutionist, or, at least, of a sympathiser with revolutionists. I will not ask you why, for I think I know their reason; they doubted me——"

"Wait," cried the old man; "yes, you are right. They doubted you, but not as you may think. They feared that you were not—not yourself, not Makofski in reality, only someone personating him. They brought the Princess in the hope that she might unmask you if you were an impostor."

"Ah!" Makofski threw back his head and laughed.

"But they doubt the Princess a little also, and if you go to her now they will become yet more suspicious."

"I see; they will say we are *both* spies, and that she recognized me quite *too* readily."

"Something like that."

"The case is here, my friend. If I refuse to go to this lady I must leave your house. I must hide myself anew, and this time it will be even more difficult than before. Besides, if I go away thus it will leave you, yes, and your friends, in a measure open to suspicion. In short, if the Princess is a spy, and I flee from her, I am lost and you suspected. If I go to her, run the gauntlet, baffle her, or convince her that I am an ally, everything remains the same, only I must be on my guard in future."

"I wish you would join us, Makofski."

"And your associates—they do not."

"They will when they know you better."

Captain Fernand laughed, the easy confident laugh of a man secure in his own strength. Clearly he understood this old man with his flashes of excitement and his varying moods. The argument was long, and while the captain seemed to concede point after point it ended in his doing what he had fully meant to do, as if he were doing it at the urgent request of his host.

Certainly, upon consideration, he would better go, La Croix said and as for leaving his house, as for seeking a new home, that was not to be thought of. He must go, and after that there was just one way to settle all difficulty. Makofski must join their circle for his own protection as well as for the better feeling it would promote among

them. As for lack of interest, once he became acquainted with their aims and methods he would become interested, and they needed just such a worker as he would be.

At last it was so arranged, and Captain Makofski, with much reluctance, consented to allow his host to bring him before the members at the next meeting as a candidate for admittance to the brotherhood.

"You must show them my position," he stipulated. "I know so little of your work here. I wish to go into nothing blindly, and I wish on my side to be clearly understood. There must be no concealments."

Miles La Croix was exultant. He told the news to Moina as she sat by his bedside where he lay broad awake, his eyes shining with the excitement of what he considered a triumph and a gain to the great cause. He was growing more communicative toward Moina as the girl became more quietly receptive, and ceased to argue, to exclaim, and to criticise. She listened to him now with no surprise, and with perfect acquiescence.

"He was not easily persuaded," the old man went on. "He is not much interested in these people, and their troubles seem to him trifles compared with the oppressions of Russia. As for politics, he hardly knows its meaning; but he will wake up, he will soon see all as *I* see it, and then I shall have a right hand, a strong lieutenant; just the man I need."

If he had been the observant father of old he would have seen how the girl's face grew grave, and overspread with a look of disappointment. She was growing to know Captain Fernand, and to regard him more and more as a friend.

* * * * * *

"You are going to become one of the 'group,' papa tells me," she hazarded next day while the two sat alone in the little drawing-room waiting the coming of her father and tea-time together.

"Yes, unless I am rejected," he answered lightly. "You must be lenient with me, Miss La Croix. I am not an enthusiastic convert. I shall have to grow in grace."

"Do you mean," she asked eagerly, "that you do not love the cause?"

"I do not *know* the cause, I——"

"Then why—*why* did you promise to join them?"

"Why, really, I suppose it was owing in part to the pressure of circumstances. I have no strong convictions, but my heart is warm toward all poor, all oppressed humanity. And then it was greatly for your father's sake. I am glad to be allied to anything that is dear to him, and to you."

"To me?" She threw back her head, and her eyes flashed upon him. "Don't say 'dear to *me*.' It is *not* dear to me; it is detestable! Oh, yes, I thought it good and holy once. I was proud of papa's connection with it; but I was ignorant then—a poor fool! And my father, my poor father, he is its slave; some day he will be its victim. It has coiled itself about him, a slimy serpent. It is destroying him body and—yes, I *will* say it—body and soul. It has destroyed our home, it has turned his brain and darkened and warped

his intellect. It will end by killing him. Oh, why do *you* join them? Why?" She had risen in her excitement, and now she started and came to a sudden stop. "What am I saying?" she cried; "I think I am loosing my senses!" She turned away, and then suddenly faced him again. "Will you forget this?" she said brokenly. "I forgot myself; I did not——" She stopped short.

"Are you about to say that you did not mean it?" he asked gravely.

"No, I will not say that."

"Pray calm yourself, Miss La Croix, and let me assure you that every word you have uttered shall be, to me, as if I were oath-bound. Yes, more sacred, if possible. I am glad to know your feelings, and I beg you to trust me fully——"

"No, not when you have become one of *them*."

"Before, then. Will you not talk with me again upon this subject, and pray calm yourself now. Your father may join us at any moment. I can help you—I am sure I can help you. As for your father——" The sound of a closing door caused them both to start. "When may I talk with you again?" he asked hastily.

"To-night, perhaps, or——"

His countenance fell. "Not this evening," he said regretfully. "I must go out; I have promised——"

"Hush," she said, and with the word the door opened and admitted Miles La Croix.

* * * * * *

During the rest of that day there was a lightening of the cloud upon Moina's brow. She was grave still, and very thoughtful, seeming to have ample food for solitary reflection; but if Madeline could have seen her face to-day she would have said: "She has found something to cheer or comfort her. The world is not so dark as yesterday." Miles La Croix shut himself in his study after dinner, and Captain Fernand joined him there for a short time. Then as she was about to leave the empty drawing-room, unaccountably dreary, for some reason, she had found it, Moina met him at the door. He was dressed for the street, and carried his hat and a light ebony cane in his well-gloved shapely hand.

"What!" she exclaimed, in her surprise, "You are going out?" And then she saw that he held a letter in his hand.

"Yes," he said, without seeming to notice her sudden change of countenance, "It seems that I must. It will be quite safe, and I expect to be back early. I was seeking you; about to ask of you a favour."

"A favour!" she faltered.

"Yes. It is only this. I wish, if I may, to leave this letter in your hands. You perceive it is not addressed. Under this envelope is another. If I am not present to-morrow at the breakfast hour, will you remove this outer wrapper and send the enclosure at once by a district messenger? It is fully addressed. One thing more. Do not speak of this to your father, I beg. It would make him uneasy, perhaps; and he is already exceedingly nervous."

She took the letter and bowed her head, but no words came; and he saw her face growing pale.

"I beg you not to be uneasy," he said. "This is only a precaution; I do not apprehend danger."

"And yet——" She held up the letter and said no more.

"That, I repeat, is a precaution. See, I have sent for a carriage; it is at the door. I shall not leave it until at my destination—no harm could possibly reach me there—and I shall return as I came. In the morning you will give back my letter, and I may be able to amuse you with some account of my mission. And now——" He stood silently regarding her for a moment, then suddenly held out his hand. "Fancy me going out to battle, and wish me success."

She put her hand in his, and lifted her eyes to his face.

"I wish you success," she said, tremulously; "success—and safety."

He smiled as he turned at the stair-head, and she answered the smile; but when the street door had closed upon him, she went back to her own boudoir, the letter clasped tightly in her hand, and the shadow upon her brow and in her eyes once more.

Miles La Croix retired early that night, and Moina sat beside him and mutely stroked his hand, letting sleep come as it would; forgetting him almost, so absorbed she was with her own thoughts.

An hour passed, and then another; the eyes of the old man still wide open and sleepless. He was not restless, however. Instead, he was almost smiling, absorbed, like Moina, with his own thoughts; pleased as an obstinate, eager child at thought of his victory gained; the end he had so coveted—won: the promise wrung from Captain Fernand. He was in a complacent mood. And so midnight drew on, and sleep came with it. He lay, for the first time in many days, asleep without a struggle, breathing regularly, and lying quietly, instead of tossing and crying out, or babbling his secrets, as he was used to do.

As the hours grew late, it was Moina who became restless; and when her father slept, she began to move about, to pace to and fro; to lift a corner of the curtain and peer down into the street below. Midnight struck. Her father slept on, while her own agitation increased. Going to the bedside, she would put out a hand as if to waken the sleeper; then she would draw back, and start, and listen, as some street sound was borne to her eager ears.

So another long hour passed. And now her watch at the window was almost constant. At last she could bear the suspense no longer. She turned from the window and went again to the bedside. She had turned down the light until objects about the room were but dimly discernible, and as she moved swiftly forward, her thoughts tossed 'twixt anxiety and sudden determination, her foot struck against a footstool misplaced by her in her restlessness, and it in its turn was thrust against a frail reading-stand, which held a heavy open book. Down came stand and book with a crash. The accident seemed to calm her; but it disturbed the sleeper, who tossed in his bed and began to mutter, but without waking.

Moina stood still for a moment, with a hand pressed hard against a loudly beating heart. There was something she was burning to know, a question she was longing to ask. Any other question she might have put to him as he slept, and been very sure of her answer. But not *this* question—not this! For the sake of others she had

taught herself to wrest hateful secrets from the lips of a sleeping father. For her own sake she could not—she would not; and so she had turned from the window determined to wake him.

Miles La Croix had fallen asleep thinking of his coming argument with Lugos and Crashaw, and of the announcement he should make. There would be opposition, he well knew, and warm discussion. He was eager for it all. He knew what he should say; and, as slumber overcame him, he was rehearsing the scene for his own pleasure.

"You mistake, sirs," Moina heard him say, his voice becoming more distinct as he went on. "He has been perfectly frank with me. I know where he went. He showed me her letter."

"*Her* letter!" Moina, stooping to rescue the fallen book, sprang suddenly erect again.

"How can *I* guess what she wanted?—a woman like that," he went on. "And he *told* me to tell you. That man does not fear *you;* and as for Madam La Princess——" The hands of the sleeper were thrown out as if in significant gesture. "Eh?—what's that? Both enemies! Spies! Met before, you say——?" He threw himself violently across the bed, and then, as if awakened by the rage of his dream, sprang suddenly erect and looked about him with wide-open eyes.

Moina stood still with the book at her feet. She knew that her father was awake—that she ought to go to him; but her feet seemed leaden, and in her ears rang the words "enemies, spies, Madam La Princess." In her mind one thought drove out all else. Fernand Makofski, who had sought refuge under her father's roof from danger that might lie in wait anywhere outside, *forgot* the danger, or braved it recklessly, at the bidding of Madam La Princess Orloff. In that moment Moina and her own heart stood face to face.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHO LAUGHS LAST.

It was a little past the hour when Captain Makofski presented himself in the boudoir of Princess Sacha. That she had been awaiting him, and with some impatience, was apparent; but he made no excuses. He only bowed low over the hand she graciously extended, and said, as if this were a most ordinary meeting—

"You sent for me, madam?"

The careless ease of the man disconcerted the Princess. She moved back a pace, and the half-mocking smile upon her lips gave way to another expression. Up to that moment she had felt certain as to the result of the interview—quite assured as to her complete triumph, and the confusion of Captain Fernand. Now—a little of the mocking light left her face. She took a moment to rally her forces while she drew back to the chair she had just left to receive him, and motioning him to a seat near her, resumed her own.

"I sent for you; yes, captain," she replied, toying lightly with a vividly plumed fan, which she kept in her hand and used with picturesque effect. "And I am greatly your debtor for this pleasure."

He bowed and seated himself with the cool air of a man who, having not the least personal interest in the occasion or its objects, is yet quite at the disposal of a lady. If Captain Makofski had known the Princess Sacha very well indeed he could not have chosen a surer way of ruffling her composure had he wished to accomplish such a result.

The scarlet lips were pressed tightly together for a moment, but the fluttering fan was eloquent. Finally she spoke.

"I fear my request was not to your liking, Captain *Makofski*."

This was not the way she had meant to begin, and there was a touch of acidity in her low tone.

"On the contrary, Madam La Princess, I am pleased to be here."

"Thanks," with a light mocking laugh; "that was very prettily said. If I were not *so well aware* that you are a compatriot one might mistake you easily for a Frenchman."

"Really? But my English, madam, is even better than my French."

He said this gravely, and then was silent. Evidently he would not help her to make conversation.

Her eyelids drooped for a moment, and she bit her lips behind the fluttering fan. Then she folded this weapon deliberately, and laid it upon her knee. Madam La Princess was on her mettle. There would be no quarter now.

"You are wondering, of course, why I saw fit to know you yesterday," she began.

"It was very good of you."

"It was not so meant, I assure you; but I will explain. When I was told that a Russian exile was here I was naturally a trifle interested, even before I was aware that the gentleman in whose company you saw me, as well as his friend Rufus Crashaw, wished us to meet. You may be aware of their reasons?"

"They were sceptical as to my identity. They hoped to confound me through you, or to confirm my uncorroborated statement, I believe," he said, negligently.

"Exactly so. I have said that I wished to see—Captain Makofski. For this I had a reason."

"Yes?"

"I did not know the motive of these two men. I did not know whether my identification would help or hurt Fernand Makofski the exile, and so I said to myself, I will be cautious. Perhaps it will be well to feign ignorance. I may be able to serve Makofski best if I meet him as a stranger."

She paused with her brilliant eyes full upon his face, a triumphant smile wreathing her lips.

"Yes?" again murmured her *vis-à-vis* in a tone of polite indifference, while his face continued calmly attentive.

"You will perceive that I set out with a desire to be of use, if possible." Here the smile became a soft little laugh. "For—how oddly things come about in this odd little world we inhabit—over there in Russia, before his banishment to Siberia, *I knew Fernand Makofski very well*."

She had lowered her eyes again, for just a moment, before firing this shot, the better to emphasize it later. But the smile died out of her face, and, for a moment, the two sat silently regarding each other. And now it was *he* who was smiling. It was he who spoke first.

"I can hardly forgive myself," he said, "for having caused Madam La Princess even a passing disappointment, but as you have made it easy for me to ask the questions, permit me. Do I fill the rôle of Captain Fernand Makofski acceptably?"

The face of Madam La Princess would have furnished a superb study in expression. Amazement, incredulity, anger, and, finally, something bordering upon admiration, flashed across her face. Slowly she pushed back her chair; slowly she arose.

"Captain Makofski, could he see and pardon the masquerade, could not but admire the manner in which it is carried out. Such *sang froid*, not to use a harsher name, is beyond praise. May I ask the object of this—impersonation?"

The man before her dropped his careless smile and lounging attitude. He sat erect, and his face became coldly inscrutable.

"Let us call a truce, madam," he said. "You have sent for me. I am here—wherefore?"

"What!" The Princess recoiled a step, and the hot blood flashed into her face. "This is insufferable!" she cried. "Wherefore? why have I sent for you? I will *tell* you, monsieur. You, who call yourself Fernand Makofski, I have sent for you to tell you that you are an *impostor*, that Fernand Makofski, who was once my friend, and a true man, is languishing in a Siberian dungeon or lying in a Siberian grave. *Such* men do not escape the clutches of the tyrant. And you!—who are you, and why have you dared, *how* have you dared, assume the name of a Russian martyr?"

"That I may watch over and protect other martyrs, perhaps," he said with dignity. "Madam, compose yourself. Surely you have something to say that is more to the purpose than all this?"

His coolness was like fuel to flame.

"More to the purpose! Yes, if it is to the purpose to tell you that I mean to unmask you—to denounce you!"

"And to whom?" The coolness of the man, the unwavering gleam of the eyes behind their sheltering glasses, the attitude, so firm and so self-assured, more than all, perhaps, a something in the voice, struck through her wrath and startled her into silence for a moment. When she spoke again it was in a calmer tone. She knew that she had a more than ordinary foe to deal with.

"To the man you have imposed upon, probably for some base end—to Miles La Croix."

"Ah! to him? And since when has Madam the Princess Orloff felt so keen an interest in Miles La Croix and his affairs?"

The thrust was unexpected, disconcerting; but she held her ground.

"That need not concern you. It will also interest the police to learn the truth about you."

"You think so? Well, perhaps you are right. And your friends,

Messrs. Lugos, and Crashaw, what of them? Madam, this promises to be a long discussion, will it not be more comfortable to resume your seat?"

"Very likely." She had conquered or concealed all signs of anger now, piqued into coolness, in her turn, by his own inimitable *sang froid.* And the two reseated themselves with much deliberation and so renewed the debate. "Messrs. Lugos and Crashaw?" she repeated, "*they* will need but a hint. They suspect you already."

"Say they *did* suspect me. Thanks to you, madam, they suspect me no longer. And how, may I ask, do you intend to explain your own course? You have recognized me, claimed me, as Fernand Makofski, an acquaintance, almost a friend. How will you unsay this? Reflect, madam."

She flashed a glance at him, wicked, smiling, malicious.

"Don't think I am unprepared for *that*," she said. "I shall tell them—I can afford to be candid with *you*—that all I did was but a snare to lead you on, to get you to commit yourself, to entangle yourself hopelessly."

"And you expect them to believe this?"

"I expect them to believe *me*."

"Good. Now, for the sake of the argument, let us suppose this done, you have denounced me, it becomes my turn. You are possibly aware that *your* loyalty is doubted in some quarters?"

"*My* loyalty?"

"To the cause. The great cause we are all supposed to serve with our lives, if need be. You are, it is found, secretly devoted to the Russian Government."

"Bah!"

"It is not *I* who believe this, of course, but others. Well, you denounce *me;* I denounce *you*, I tell those who may be called upon to judge between us that you sent for me, and found me *opposed to you.* As you knew Captain Makofski so well you, no doubt, will remember that there was, and still is, a faction who declared him loyal, and that *he* always denied the charge of nihilism. Finding me thus opposed to you, that is to say, *not* an emissary of the Russian police, you turn upon me for your own safety. *You* will say that all you have done was a snare for me, but to minds already tinctured with suspicion that tale will sound improbable, unless you can prove, *prove*, mind you, that you *are* loyal to the cause, you will not crush *me*, madam, but yourself." He had spoken with some emphasis, a dash of scorn, a touch of sarcasm; a spectator, had there been such, would have wondered if he were trying to enrage her, and so throw her off her guard; at least he succeeded in the former.

She crushed the plumed fan between her hands, and spoke through her clenched teeth.

"You have overshot the mark, my friend. I *am* doubted by those idiots, but it is in my power first to *convince* them, and then to crush them for their insolence, them and you, and since you dare me to this, do your worst, it will but cause me to take a step that otherwise would only have been delayed, and *then* it will not be *I* who am doubted, and questioned by your M. Lugos, your Rufus Crashaw;

there may be a reckoning then." She sprang up and began to pace the floor.

Behind the concealing glasses the eyes of her strange visitor wore a look of profound satisfaction. If he had paid this visit of his own accord, and for an object, he might look thus to find that object accomplished.

"Do your worst," the Princess said again. "You have undone yourself; whatever I *might* have done, that is past; I shall denounce you, I shall unmask you——"

She stopped short at the thought, that while she might tell who he was not, she could not tell who he *was*; and annoyed by this she paced to and fro for a time in silence, a silence which he made no attempt to break.

Finally she stopped and stood before him, leaning against the highbacked crimsoned cushioned chair she had lately occupied.

She was in full evening toilette, waves of black lace and amber satin lying about her feet, and draping her graceful little figure, while the gleam of diamond and topaz lit up her hair and entwined her throat and arms. The crimson and gilt chair back was as high as her haughty little head, and leaning there she made a charming picture which he contemplated so long in silence that at last she broke out impatiently,

"Well!"

He started like one suddenly roused from the contemplation of a beautiful picture or statue.

"Ah, pardon me?"

"What have you to say?"

"What *can* I say? Madam the Princess has said all. But, no, let me repeat my first question, Why did you send for me?"

"To denounce you."

"Pardon. You could have denounced me without that, if that were *all*. There was another object."

"You think so?" sneeringly.

"I am *sure* of it. It was, perhaps, to offer me an alternative, to make terms."

What her object might have been, madam was in no mood for making terms now.

"Bah!" she ejaculated, "never."

"Another question. Why did you feign to know me yesterday?"

"Since you have answered your own first question," she sneered, "probably you can answer that."

"Possibly. We will suppose, for instance, that you are not too well pleased with M. Lugos and his friend, you would not mind doing them some slight ill turn, and you fancied you might do this through *me*. Wait," seeing her about to speak, "you sent for me to overwhelm me, to extort from me a full confession of who and what I am, my aims, my motives; when I was at your mercy, *then* you would make your terms." Again she essayed to speak but he went on.

"Unfortunately, we began wrong, I have made you angry. But now I beg you to calm yourself, to think. I do not *wish* to be denounced, Madam the Princess; I would like to hear your terms."

He did not speak like a man afraid or uneasy, and, again, that singularity in look and tone and manner served to calm, as quickly almost as it had enraged her.

"You presume quite too much," she said coldly; "I *should* have asked you, perhaps, what was your motive, first, in fastening yourself upon the La Croix——"

"Go on, madam."

"In taking upon yourself the name of Fernand Makofski."

"Pray finish."

"And in assuming to be in fear of 'a certain Russian emissary,' a woman, who could be, according to your description, none other than myself? Where have you seen me? what do you know of me, that you should dare take this liberty?"

"Is there anything more?"

"Can you answer *this* much?"

"I will answer these questions, certainly, and in their reverse order, as a matter of convenience. First, I assumed to be in danger from a Russian emissary, because I wished a pretext for keeping closely at home, and for seeing few people. I described *you* as the possible 'emissary' in question, because I knew *you* would be recognized from the description as the person meant, and thus give strength to all my story. I knew this statement could in no wise injure you among these people, as they already knew you as 'suspected of being an emissary;' of course, I could not anticipate your very prompt appearance at the La Croix, I rather fancied you were *not* a visitor there."

"Really! your audacity is only equalled by your astonishing knowledge of my movements and plans."

He bowed, as if acknowledging a compliment.

"Well?" she said impatiently, "you display a remarkable knowledge of Russian affairs certainly, but in attempting to personate Fernand Makofski, you reckoned, probably, without taking *me* into consideration."

"Perhaps," he said, and again that queer look shone in the half-concealed eyes, the shadow of a smile lurked about his mouth.

"*Why* did you take the name of Makofski?" she demanded.

"Madam, the day is not far distant, I trust, when I can answer you fully; for the present, pardon me, I must decline to speak further on that."

"And *I* must insist upon an answer," she said.

"Very good. Then you must make this suffice: it was the only name at my command that would suit my purpose."

"And you call that an answer!"

"It is all the answer I intend to make—now."

"You talk as if we were to meet indefinitely," she scoffed.

"Possibly we may."

For a moment it seemed as if she were about to blaze forth again; then she controlled herself resolutely.

"And why have you forced yourself into the La Croix household?" she sneered.

"Forced myself? Not at all. I am, I believe, a very welcome

guest. Only this evening I proposed to seek other quarters and was overruled in no lukewarm manner."

"Oh, have that as you will; no doubt Moina La Croix finds the society of a *Russian officer* charming. She——"

"Madam, we will leave the name of that young lady out of our conversation, it has no place in it." This time there was unmistakable sternness in his voice.

"Ah! Then it was *not* on her account?" At last she had found a vulnerable point, she thought, exultantly; at last she had broken that tantalizing calm. "That, now, would have been a different affair, have put another face upon things. I *might* not have interfered with *such* a mission."

"Madam——"

But the imp of perversity now had full possession. She laughed gleefully.

"Ah, my good sir, the way of the trangressor *is* hard. Do you happen to know, you who know so much, a certain handsome fellow called Rene Savorin?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him as a *rival?*"

"If I were suing for the favour of Madam La Princess Orloff, I should have in him a rival, surely."

Again her eyes flashed, but she was not defeated yet: again her scornful laugh rang out.

"Oh! I have given him up to *her*. Caught in the rebound, you know."

"Madam, enough——"

"But there is worse to come. This *is* serious. You have *another* rival, monsieur, a man who fights and schemes, and plots *to win;* and who has set his heart on winning Moina La Croix. That man—what will you give to know *his* name, my friend?"

He was silent.

"Ah! but I see you are awake at last. Well, let me render good for ill; in return for what you have *not* told, I tell you his name; it is *Rufus Crashaw*."

With one quick stride he was beside her, grasping her jewelled arm with a grip of steel.

"Woman!" he said, between his set teeth, "are you telling me the truth?"

And now both faces are pale.

"Beast!" she cries, recoiling from him. He releases her suddenly. He is the first to recover his composure.

"Monster!" she goes on, "insolent impostor! *Ah!* I have had enough of this! Leave me! Go! go, *at once!* Whoever you are, *whatever* you are, I have done with you! Before sunrise to-morrow, the police, Crashaw, Lugos, the La Croix, father and daughter, *all* shall know that you are *not* Fernand Makofski! that you are a *spy*—an assassin, perhaps. *Go*, I say, *go!*"

The nameless one was himself again.

"Gladly as I would go, madam, I have yet a duty to perform."

"Go, I tell you!"

"I might take you at your word and so avenge myself."

She made a furious gesture and sprang toward the bell.

With perfect self-possession, he stepped before her and caught both of her wrists, holding them firmly as he spoke.

"Madam La Princess, neither now nor at any other time will you 'denounce' me, or in any other way interfere with my plans."

"Release me, ruffian that you are!"

"In doing so you would destroy your own hopes, baffle your dearest wishes; render your visit to America, and its *real object*, of no avail."

She caught her breath quickly, and ceased to struggle.

"In Heaven's name!" she cried, "what are you? *who are you!*"

"I am the one man," he said, slowly, "and the *only* man who can help you to a knowledge of the truth *concerning Basil Petrolowski*. Look; this farce has gone far enough; it was not of *my* seeking."

He let go her hands, and, as on the day of his interview with Miles La Croix, removed the disguising wig and beard and spectacles, standing thus before her with a look of severity upon his face.

"*You!*" gasped the Princess, after a long incredulous stare, with dilating eyes and pallid cheeks. "*You!*"

CHAPTER LX.

FRANK PRICE SPEAKS.

ON the morning that followed the interview between the Princess Sacha and the strange personage whom we will continue to call Fernand Makofski, a little group were gathered in one of the private rooms of St. Luke's Hospital.

Upon the bed, drawn out into the centre of the room, lay a small emaciated figure, with big hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, and little claw-like hands, that plucked unceasingly at the counterpane as he spoke from time to time, slowly, and with painful effort.

Close beside him, with eyes for no one else, ready with tender touch and swiftest ministry to anticipate each want of the sufferer, sat the nurse, while the doctor sat beside a table near at hand, and a woman with sad eyes and upon her face a look of strained eagerness sat beside one of the windows, where she could see the bed and its occupant, herself unseen.

Near the bed, on the side opposite the nurse, sat two others, one a small man, with an expressionless countenance, who sat where he could look directly into the face of the child upon the bed, and be seen as well by him. The other, a large man, with a benevolent expression, who sat in the background, and who was, in fact, a policeman in plain clothes: our friend Bates.

The small man held in his hand a paper, which was many times folded, and looked like, and was, a voluminous memorandum. He was glancing at this as if to refresh his memory, and, after a moment of this, and a long look at the boy, a look which was met and returned with a fleeting feeble smile, he said:

"You think he is quite able to talk to-day, doctor?" He spoke low, and the physician replied in the same guarded tone.

"I think it must be now or never, Mr. Norton. They seldom last long after this stage is reached. You will need to speak loud and very distinctly."

From the moment when he was traced to the hospital, where he had since lain, carefully nursed and faithfully guarded, little Frank Price, the florist's unfortunate delivery boy, had lain speechless, and, for many days, senseless. And every day Little Norton, to whom this task had been delegated, had visited him, wearing upon his face a mask of cheerfulness and evident good-fellowship that was noticed by poor Frank long before he was able to make any sign that the daily visits were pleasing to him. There were some days when he saw nothing and no one, lying insensible, except as he was aroused by his attendants, only to sink back into lethargy again. Then he lay for more long days, with eyes wide open, but seeing nothing, understanding nothing, feeling nothing, or so it seemed. Then came a glimmer of reason in the eye, reason and remembrance; then throes of pain; for days of suffering he lay longing, signalling, evidently full of distress, filled with some thought which was horrible to him; but he could not speak at first, and then, when speech came back, it was forbidden him. He could only talk at the risk of his life.

Then came an hour when the worst must be told to stricken mother and anxious watchers at the bedside. Little Frank must die. Mind, reason, speech, came back only as heralds of the great change, only at the turn of the tide.

At the right moment Norton had told the attendant surgeon and physician how much hung upon the revelation which this dying boy might make. He might be able to indicate to them the would-be assassins of Elias Lord. He might even denounce his own murderers. Frank must be permitted to speak.

And so, to-day, they were gathered about his bedside: the doctor and nurse because they were necessary; the mother because she could not be persuaded to leave her boy, and they had no heart to urge it; Bates ready to go here, there, anywhere, at a word; and Norton, with all the facts, as they were known to Drexel, stored in his memory, and, for the sake of convenience and easiest reference, written down, with suggestions to aid in his investigation. Ready, also, man of many accomplishments that he was, to "take down" the words that should fall from the sick boy's lips.

Frank had been already prepared for his part in the coming interview. He had been very docile, very silent, but it was easy to see in his restless eyes that he was eager and anxious, seriously troubled.

"Frank, my boy," said the doctor, coming to the bedside, bending over him and speaking in loud, full tones, "we are going to let you talk presently. We all know that you are anxious to do so, but it's going to tire you very much, I fear, and you will have to listen as well as to talk. This gentleman, who has been so kind to you, wants to tell you something that it is necessary you should know, and he wants to ask you some questions." The boy's eyes dilated. He

looked from one to the other, and made an effort to speak. "Wait a moment, Frank. I was about to say that, in order to save you from too much talking, he will ask his questions, as many of them as he can, so that you can answer them by a simple yes or no. After that you may talk, may say all that you wish to say; only, remember, you must speak slowly and stop often to rest." He stepped back, and the nurse raised him a little upon his pillow and gave him a spoonful of some cordial, which seemed to revive and strengthen him. Then the doctor produced an ear-trumpet and adjusted at his ear, leaving it in the hand of the nurse, who kept it deftly in the right position. "We are going to let Mr. Norton talk through this," smiled the doctor. "You are not so *very* deaf, but you *are* very weak. It will help you to hear, and Mr. Norton can talk the easier. We don't want any outside audience, you know."

The boy smiled feebly. The novelty seemed to please him, and when Mr. Norton spoke his first words through the long black tube it was easy to see that he was pleased yet more and surprised as well at the ease with which he heard each word.

"I can hear you," he whispered, "oh! ever so plain."

"I am going to speak about the night on which you were hurt, Frank," began Little Norton, "and I will tell you right here that you need not fear that you are going to be blamed for anything that may have happened. We are all your friends, and we hope, among us, to be able to find out something that will be of benefit to——" he hesitated, and then concluded, "to your mother and yourself."

"Yes, sir," answered the boy in his husky whisper, which they had to follow closely to fully understand.

"Do you remember all that happened that day?"

"Yes, sir. I have thought it all over and over."

"Well, let me see how much I know about it. Everything went on as usual, did it not, until your employer sent you to carry a large basket of flowers to a house on Fifth Avenue." He paused here, but Frank was silent; he had withdrawn his gaze from the speaker's face. "Do you remember the number of that house, Frank?"

"No, sir; but—I could find it, I—I am sure."

"Do you remember the name of the gentleman who lived there?"

"No, sir, I don't. It warn't a long name, though."

"Had you ever been there before?"

"No, sir."

"Now, my boy, I am going to tell *you* something. When that basket of flowers was found upon the big table, where it was left by the boy who brought it, something else was left there also. This other package was not Mr. Lord's property—Mr. Lord is the owner of the house—neither was it meant for anyone else in his family. Now, don't you see that these people would like to know where to find the people who sent that package?"

Frank listened to this ingenious distortion of facts with a look of surprise and perplexity upon his wan face, but he said nothing.

"Now, of course, you know it is not pleasant to be keeping other people's property, especially if it is valuable, and so the people at the

house began to inquire after this boy," Norton went on in a smilingly affable tone; "and so they began to look around for the boy who brought the basket. If he had been found there might have been a reward, don't you see. That's what you've missed by getting hurt, maybe."

The eyes of the sick boy turned from his face to that of his mother, who had approached the bed to catch what he might say, and who now stood close behind the nurse. "No," he said, with a look that was full of regret and contrition fixed upon her face. "No, sir, I couldn't have had it—I—I'm very sorry, sir; but—but I didn't take in the flowers—it—it was another boy."

Little Norton continued to smile reassuringly.

"Ah! That was the way of it," he said. "Well, never mind. You shan't miss anything by it, anyhow."

"I've been punished for it bad enough, sir, if it was *very* wrong," whispered Frank.

"Punished. Ah, you mean by getting hurt. Well, you're going to tell us all about that soon. What was the name of this other boy?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Nor where he lived?"

"No, sir."

"Well, well, Frank, you just tell us what you can about this boy. Where you met him, and how he came to take the basket instead of you. Don't hurry nor get excited; it's all right, and you shan't be the loser—so far as the reward goes."

Again the nurse moistened the boy's lips, and changed his position slightly, and then he began:—

"I never saw the boy until that day that I took the basket for that place on Fifth Avenue, but I remember just how it all was, because," reflectively, "he seemed a little queer *then*, I thought. There was two or three of us started out of the store together, but we separated afore we'd got far. When I was crossin' over, going from Broadway to the Avenue, I got into a crowd at a corner and had to stop a minute. It was there I met the boy. There was a card stuck on the end of the basket with the name of the man it wus for, and the number of his house. An' I remember noticing that it was written very big and black, so it wus easy to read."

He was obliged to pause for a moment and struggle for breath. A little more of the cordial was given him and he went on again.

"When I first seen him, he wus standin' right close by me, kind of scrouched down, with his face up closte to the basket, looking at the writing on the card."

"Ah!" breathed Little Norton.

"He wus a little feller," the boy went on, "littler than me, and he kind o' looked up good-natured like an' laughed, an', says he, 'Don't git mad, I didn't mean nothin', I seen the name on that card jest as I wus standin' here, and then I took another peek to see if, maybe, I wusn't mistaken. Why, *I* know that house right well, I've got an uncle livin' there.' An' then we got acros't the street, and he kept walkin' along beside me an' kept on talkin'; wanted to know if I minded

him goin' alongside of me. An' then he told about his uncle who wus some kind of a head servant there, and how he wanted so much to go in and see that beautiful house, and his uncle would never let him, and he'd jest like to pop in with me and surprise him. He said his mother was better off than his uncle, and they kind o' coddled him up and wouldn't let him go and do jobs o' work like other boys ; and he'd like better to do such work as me, than jest to hang around home and nobody to play with ; and he knew we boys must have some good times."

Again he paused, and the doctor said, "Don't try to tell too much, Frank ; just tell about the flowers."

"He was dressed first-rate," Frank resumed, almost as if he had not heard, "and he had some candy in his pocket, and he took out some money out of another pocket and kind a-jingled it as he talked. 'They gave me plenty of money,' he said, 'but I'll bet you have the most fun.' When we had got most to the house, he was a-showin' me the way, he turned round kind of quick like and says, 'Look here, you let me take that basket into the house, jest for a joke on uncle and to see the house inside, so I can laugh at him ; he'll think I'm workin' for a florist, and I'll go flying home to-night and lecture to my mother about it, and then the laugh'll be on him. Then I'll make him give me somethin' for a treat, he's real liberal, an' you and me'll go snacks with it.'" Here he paused again, and fell back seemingly exhausted.

"It's too much," said the doctor, and for some moments all was silent in the room, while doctor and nurse bent over the sick boy. Presently the former drew back a little, and said in an undertone to the detective,

"Get it overwith as soon as possible."

The boy was breathing easier once more, and he turned his eyes anxiously toward Little Norton.

"He give me half-a-dollar," he said, "and I thought it couldn't do any harm. I am sorry."

"Don't think about that, Frank," said the detective, "and let *me* do some of the talking. I will ask some questions, and you can give short answers. You say the boy offered you fifty cents, and you let him take in the basket?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when you gave the basket to him; near the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"The boy went a few steps ahead, did he not? say, just when you were passing the basement windows?"

"Yes, sir," with a look of surprise.

"Who had the basket then?"

"I had it."

"And you let him take it at the foot of the steps?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he stay in the house long—talking with his uncle?"

"No, sir : he came out quick, looking kind of scared, I thought. 'Let's hurry,' he says, 'there's a party there, and they hustled me out.'"

"And so you hurried away together."

"Well—he kept going ahead of me, and hurrying for quite a way."

"I see; and he left you soon, did he not? He was in a hurry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he ask you not to tell that he took the flowers?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did he ask you to meet him again?"

"Yes——"

"The next night—at the corner, or near the place where you were hurt?"

"Yes, sir. He said we would have a little supper together, sir."

"Now, Frank, try and tell us just how you got hurt. You met this boy and started to cross the street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see, before you started to cross, a little old man who stood near you?"

The boy struggled suddenly, as if to lift himself, and his eyes were distended with excitement and terror.

"Yes! Oh, yes! Have they caught him? The wicked old man. *He* did it. It was not the waggon. I didn't see him till it was too late. I saw his eyes glaring right into mine, and then he *struck*. Oh, how it hurt! and then—I didn't know any more."

"That is enough, Frank." The detective shut up his note-book. "That is enough. No, we have not found him; but we *shall* find him, never fear. You would know him, would you not? You saw him standing upon the corner, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir. Yes! I saw him. I would know him!"

Little Norton took from his pocket a picture, none other than an enlarged copy of the tiny likeness of the little old man taken by his detective camera at the door of the Princess Orloff's apartment.

"Did he look like that, Frank?"

"That *is* him! That's *him*, sir. He stood at the corner just like *that;* and that's his cane, and all!"

Little Norton placed another picture before him.

"And do you know *that?*"

"Yes, yes! It's that boy. It is. Oh, *where* did you get them?"

"Queer things happen sometimes, Frank. Would you like to see that boy?"

"Yes, I would. *He* didn't mean any harm. *He* didn't know the old man."

Confiding, honest childhood, *full of faith in its kind.*

Little Norton and Officer Bates left the hospital together, to separate outside its doors and hasten in opposite directions, like men who were intent upon urgent matters.

Before they separated, Norton put a key in his companion's hand.

"Here is the key of the room," he said; "go straight there and get the bundle of photographs. You will find them all ready and waiting for you upon the desk. See that they are distributed; that every officer has one, or *sees* one. *Now* we have got something to work upon. If we can catch that old fox *now*, we can hold him."

"With those pictures to help us," said Bates, "it will be very strange if we *don't* run him in."

CHAPTER LXI.

COUNTER-PLOTTING.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that he left the presence of Madam La Princess at an early hour, Captain Makofski did not return to the La Croix roof until it was nearing dawn.

A pale girl, sleepless and watchful at her window above, saw him enter, peering down breathlessly through cautiously-parted curtains, and then threw herself upon her couch, burying her face in the pillow, in an attitude of misery never assumed by those who seek or hope for sleep.

The packet, which he had entrusted to Moina, he found beside his breakfast plate. Moina herself did not appear.

"She had not slept very well," Margot explained, "and her head ached a little; she would be better soon."

Makofski, glancing from the messenger to the packet in his hand, looked serious, and seemed inclined to ponder; but Miles La Croix scarcely heeded either message or messenger. He was full of another subject.

When Margot, having served their breakfast, withdrew, Makofski lightly touched upon his visit of the previous evening.

"After all, it was nothing. A test, perhaps; and, more than all, a desire to ask for information concerning a certain Russian, a friend, who had suddenly been lost sight of—such things happen sometimes. In fact, there's little to tell. I gain this, however; I need no longer remain in seclusion. I think there is nothing to fear from Madam the Princess Orloff."

La Croix was satisfied with this, and did not follow up the subject. Instead, he broached a topic of his own. To expedite matters, he explained, he had sent for Lugos and Crashaw; he expected them soon, and he meant to have everything settled—to have Makofski one of them without delay.

"You will meet with opposition," said Makofski; "but I leave all in your hands. Understand, if I join you it must not be upon sufferance. While I am willing to be of use among you, I do not *beg* the honour, and I profess no especial enthusiasm; I have no grievance."

Half an hour before the two revolutionists appeared upon the scene, Makofski, availing himself of his extended freedom, went out, "To stroll about the city and become acquainted with it," he said.

The interview between La Croix and his two visitors was a long one, and he did indeed "meet with opposition." Strong and well sustained up to a certain point, then weakening, and yielding finally as if to the force of superior argument.

Neither of the two displayed too much surprise or curiosity when told that the Princess had sent for Captain Makofski, and that the latter had obeyed her summons. And they went away, leaving Miles La Croix well pleased with the result of the interview.

They had made but one stipulation. There were certain matters in progress that must be completed before Makofski became one at their

councils. But these things had been amicably disposed of, and the two separated with all appearance of mutual good feeling, mutual satisfaction.

But, as on other occasions, the last word had not been spoken in the little room behind the studio.

Crashaw and Lugos walked to the little oblong park not far from the house, and there sat down. It was a quiet place, and well adapted for a confidential chat.

"We may as well stop here," Lugos had said, "for one of us must go back."

"I knew there was something on your mind," said Crashaw.

"Your—instincts are very—reliable," sneered Lugos. "There is something on my mind; I am going to see the Princess."

"You!"

"Yes, the occasion warrants it. And you—you must go back to La Croix and get him to sign a transfer, putting the business we have in train for a week hence into the hands of another 'group.'"

"What! He won't do it."

"He *will*, if he knows that to refuse will keep his precious friend out a fortnight longer. Come, you know how to manage La Croix."

Ten minutes later, Moina La Croix, having seen Captain Makofski, Crashaw, and Lugos leave the house, each in his turn, came down to the studio seeking her father. She entered quietly, opening and closing the door in the almost noiseless manner acquired in her experience, first as nurse, and then as nocturnal visitor at her father's bedside.

She pushed aside a heavy curtain and advanced to a tall screen which shut off her view of the inner door. Here she paused, startled by the sound of a voice from the inner room.

It was the voice alone that first made her pause. She recognized it as that of Crashaw, and half turned to retreat as she came, unseen and unheard. Then, as the words of the half-heard sentence suddenly shaped themselves into meaning, she turned again, drew closer to the screen, and bent forward, listening intently.

* * * * * *

As soon as he had parted from Crashaw, M. Lugos hailed the first cab that crossed his path and drove straight to the hotel of the Princess.

The card which he sent up to the room of that lady by one of the house servants bore the legend,

"M. LUGOS, *Oculist*."

And he added, verbally, "You may say that I have brought the eyeglasses she wished to try."

If the Princess Sacha was displeased or anxious because of this visit, she did not suffer it to appear when M. Lugos entered her dainty reception-room and bowed before her. Instead, she received him with a frigid bow and the direct question—

"To what do I owe this honour, sir?" put in the coldest of terms.

The man seemed in no wise disturbed by this reception, and his answer was calmly business-like.

"Entirely to the fact that last evening you saw fit to receive here the person who calls himself Captain Makofski."

"Well?" Her eyes met his full. Her face was haughty. There was evident and open dislike in look and tone. Her manner was totally unlike that with which she had met the false Makofski. For this man there was no sarcasm, no mocking jokes, no smiling taunts, no graceful coquettish pantomime. Madam La Princess, in her own stately abode, might have given an audience to a recalcitrant groom or an importuning serf with just that air. But her visitor showed no surprise, no resentment; it would seem that he must have expected nothing different.

"You are undoubtedly willing to explain, madam?" he said.

She regarded him for a moment in haughty silence.

"If I had only myself to consider, I should give you, sir, a very short and decisive negative; as it is, and more for the sake of the gentleman you mention than for my own, I will say this. I had *two* motives in sending for Captain Makofski; first, *and least*, you are, perhaps, aware that Captain Makofski, upon his trial, never admitted his connection with the nihilists. I wished to apply a little test, for I could readily see that you would not lose much time in making an ally of such a man as he. Was I not right?"

"Perhaps. And this test of yours. Did it succeed?"

"About as I had expected. I was never one of those who believed in the 'loyalty' of the captain. I am confirmed in my belief. He was not what some of his enemies, even in the ranks of his chosen cause, would have made us believe. We need not hope to find an emissary of the Tsar *there*, M. Lugos."

"I am glad to hear it. You spoke of another reason."

"My other reason was strictly personal. There was a time when Captain Fernand Makofski knew one who was a—friend. That portion of the interview which was of deepest interest to me was concerning this person."

"And—may I venture to hope that you found Captain Makofski able to give you all needful information?"

"All that he could tell me was soon told. I was grateful for even so much. But let that pass. You need have no concern as to a repetition of this interview. If I ever meet him again it will not be of my seeking. And now is there need for any more words? I have identified him for you. I have gone out of my way to do this. Do you hope to find him useful to the cause?"

"Captain Makofski has not expressed a strong desire to become one of us. He confesses, on the contrary, to very slight interest in our labours."

"Naturally," she murmured indifferently.

"Still he *has* permitted his new friend, La Croix, to present his name. Madam, we would like your frank opinion. *We* can find no reason for refusing to receive him, and, of course, I mean by *we* our special group. He has been one of us abroad; of that we have demonstration. He is clearly identified with us—and—he is not a man to be kept out of anything once he is accepted among us."

"And, assuming, as you seem to believe, that Captain Makofski

will prove an earnest and intelligent worker, what is there that he need be 'kept out of?'"

M. Lugos turned, and took up his hat.

"We need not enter into that," he said. "The reputation o Captain Fernand Makofski is sufficient to make him welcome among us. The only question, after all, is that of identity. We *had* a doubt, but—that has been set at rest. Madam La Princess Sacha Orloff has pronounced him no impostor, and we accept him *upon the distinct recognition of Madam the Princess.* Whatever comes, madam, *we hold you responsible for this man.* And now, I wish you good-morning. It must be a matter of the gravest importance that brings me here again."

Their eyes met and held each other for an instant, each firm and unwavering; his calm and cold, with something that might have been a menace in their cruel depths, hers defiant and scornful. She returned his bow with the slightest inclination of her haughty head. But when the door had closed behind him, she took a slow turn up and down the pretty room.

"What does he know, or suspect?" she muttered. "That man disliked me before, he *hates* me now. It is war between us from to-day. Very good; it could not be otherwise. I must be doubly on my guard. And you, my friend, 'Makofski,' is it hate or fear he feels for you? A little of both, perhaps. I shall warn you, my 'Makofski,' and forewarned you know——" And Princess Sacha swept into her pretty dressing-room and seated herself to write a note of warning to the personage who, spite of her late denunciations, she still continued to call "Captain Makofski."

When Rene Savorin came to pay his almost daily visit he found the Princess awaiting him. A note to Fernand Makofski, sealed and addressed, lay on a little tray at her elbow.

She was somewhat pre-occupied and made known her wishes like one unaccustomed to question or contradiction. It was only after she had ceased speaking, and awaited his answer, which did not come readily, that she troubled herself to look attentively into his face. What she saw there caused her own to grow grave.

"My friend," she said with unusual sweetness, "you are tiring, I see, of playing the part of messenger. I have overtasked your friendship."

"It is not that! You *know* it is not!" he burst out. "There may be a higher mission than that of private postboy. But I have been glad to be even *that* in your service, so long as it was between you and those whom you did not wish to receive here. Those who were personally distasteful to you, but——" he flushed and stopped short.

"But you do not wish to be the bearer of a note to this man. Listen, Rene, at a time less serious than this, I might have answered you angrily; I cannot afford to do so now. I *need* your friendship."

He started suddenly—impulsively.

"Wait. Let me finish. You know that I identified Mr. La Croix's guest as Makofski, the Russian captain?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that I sent for this man to come to me here last evening?"

"Yes; as another branch of my 'general utility.' I am Rufus Crashaw's escape-valve. I had it from him."

"From him? Ah! Well, we will go back to that. I wonder if you know, too, that I was honoured by a visit from M. Lugos this day, a visit of remonstrance and admonition?"

"From *Lugos*. *No!* Has he dared? When you told him—when you forbade his visits?"

"Nevertheless, he came. He was much disturbed because I had received Makofski here, and we did not part amicably."

"Ah," sighed Rene, "I am sorry for that."

"And why?"

"Ah! you know why. That man is dangerous! I believe him to be vindictive. I believe that he hates you; sometimes I think he fears you as well. He is cool and high-handed, but, all the same, I believe he has never forgiven you for refusing to receive him here. He pretends to scoff at social distinctions, even while declaring that he lays no claim to equality with you; in spite of which, I believe he is ambitious, that he did hope to have *entrée* here, and thought that would help him in other quarters. Perhaps he hoped it would help him to a different footing when he goes back to Europe."

"He will never go back to Europe, that man. He *dare* not, talk as he will. Well, you say he is dangerous—that he may be my enemy, and yet you talk of deserting me now—now when——"

"No," he broke in, "not that! When you are in danger, when you need me most, you will find that I meant what I said to you not long ago. I belong to you *first*—to the cause after."

"Do you mean that?"

"All of it! Yes, more!"

She took up the letter and held it out to him. "Take that," she said, and when he had complied, "And now listen. That man, Makofski, and I are *not* friends. We may in the end become enemies. In the meantime, there is a secret between us; you see how frank I am, Lugos distrusts him even as he distrusts me. I don't know how much he is justified in this; I *do* know that this man, Makofski, *may* render *me* a great service. He is about to join the group, I believe."

"Yes."

"Possibly the circle?"

"Probably."

"I believe that Lugos—yes, and Crashaw—mean mischief where he is concerned. If any harm happens that we—that *I* might have prevented, Makofski will believe me to have been in the plot against him. Some day I will tell you why and how. The *man* is nothing to me, the service he alone can render me is *everything*. I can say no more. *Now*, will you serve me? will you be my friend-in-need?"

Instantly he had dropped upon one knee in graceful foreign fashion beside her, and touched her hand with his lips.

"When Sacha Orloff needs a friend she will find that I can be something more than a transmitter of messages. I will take the letter—what more?"

"Resume your old habits, be often at the La Croix's; try to *know* Makofski, and let him see that you are, if need be, on his side."

"To hear is to obey." He arose in obedience to a gesture and resumed his seat. "Is there anything else?"

"No—yes. A question. You are, I know, in Crashaw's confidence. Do you think you know him thoroughly?"

"Yes."

"Does he hide anything from you?"

"Ever since my father's death Crashaw has assumed the position of mentor. I have been a plastic pupil. He has no reason to doubt me—neither he nor Lugos. If they knew the whole *truth* they might not send me to you so freely upon all sorts of pretexts. I have been careful not to let them guess—that it is *you* I serve in my heart of hearts."

"Ah, yes! you poor, clever Rene; I know. They even half believe that you are secretly devoted to that lovely Moina La Croix. I had just a glimpse of her that day. Let them still continue to think so; but there *is* one whom it may prove best to undeceive."

"Who is that?"

A queer smile crossed her face.

"Captain Fernand Makofski," she replied.

CHAPTER LXII.

BLUDGEON VERSUS CANE.

RENE SAVORIN was as good as his word. Within a week he had resumed his old footing in the house of La Croix. Wholly in the dark as to the motive of his fair commander, he yet worked her will and bided her time. For, in spite of many misgivings and some moments of doubts, Rene Savorin, like all young men with clean souls and hearts loyal to a first passion, believed in the lovely mystery who had enchanted him; and he fought his misgivings and silenced his doubts with words of her own uttering: "Some day I will tell you all," and, "The *man* is nothing to me."

He found Fernand Makofski, viewed in the light of those last words, a very agreeable companion. Their acquaintance progressed wonderfully, and Makofski, in his turn, seemed well pleased with the handsome, courteous young fellow.

Moina, too, welcomed him back among them. Since the night of his visit to the Princess, there had been a change in her manner toward Makofski, a change to be felt rather than seen. She was more at her ease when Savorin made one of the number in the little drawing-room, and this fact Makofski was not slow to perceive.

Miles La Croix also was glad to have Rene often among them. He had liked the young fellow from the first. Rene's manner toward him had always been courteous, attentive, even reverent at times. He had felt from the first an honest liking for the fine old enthusiast, and the pity he now felt at the sad change which had overtaken him, only served to make him more kind, thoughtful, even filial, in his demeanour toward him.

Long before La Croix's illness it had suited the purpose of Rufus Crashaw to hint that he might find in Rene Savorin a possible suitor for his daughter, and the thought had pleased La Croix well. He had even hinted at it, in his turn, to Moina. But Moina had only smiled in reply, and had remained, as before, upon the most friendly terms with Rene. For these two, at least, in the midst of the general misunderstanding, understood each other. In a moment of bitterness of spirit, and hunger for human sympathy, Rene had told to Moina that which he had kept so successfully hidden from his "master"—the story of his love for the Princess Sacha, and its too evident hopelessness. Having such knowledge, Moina could afford to be frankly friendly with Rene.

When Miles La Croix arose from his sick bed, he left behind him much of knowledge, and hope, and belief. Memory had closed its door upon many things, but this idea of a future shared by Moina and Rene had remained with him; and, for different reasons, no one had cared to disturb it, to undeceive him.

With this thought in his mind, and with Rene once more an almost daily visitor in studio and drawing-room, it is not strange that Miles La Croix should make it known to Makofski.

It came about quite naturally. Rene had just left them after chatting an hour in the drawing-room with Moina, and then smoking a cigar in the studio, now the common haunt of Makofski and his host. Makofski had expressed his liking for the handsome fellow, and followed it up by a request for further information concerning him.

"He's a sort of ward of Crashaw's," La Croix had said. "His father died when he was still at school. He was an enthusiast in the *cause*. No, I never knew him well. But Rene has been much among us. He came with us, in fact, to this country. We are much attached to him—much. Perhaps you have observed that my daughter and he understand each other. Yes, I am getting old, ageing fast now; and it comforts me to think that I shall leave her in such loyal, kindly hands; for it amounts to that—I have seen it from the first."

A long silence had followed this communication, and when Makofski spoke again, it was upon another subject. He did not linger in the drawing-room that evening; but when Rene came again, he greeted him with more than his usual cordiality, and found much to say to him. Indeed, from that time he found opportunities for being often in the young man's society; something very like an intimacy sprang up between them. A close observer might well have fancied that the mysterious Russian was making a close study of Rene Savorin.

As for Rene, before he fully realized the strength of the influence, the magnetism, exerted by Makofski, he was fairly under the spell. Something in his frank, spontaneous nature responded swiftly to the strong will and force of character which seemed bent upon drawing him to itself.

"I hope you have nothing very ugly in store for him 'in the *dénoûement*,' he said, in the course of one of his verbal reports to the Princess Sacha. "I can't help liking the man, and I have entirely forgotten to distrust him. He draws one, somehow."

"So you have felt that?"

"Yes. Have you?"

"A little." A queer smile flitted across her face. "But not as you do—not in an agreeable manner. You have no need to be jealous, my poor Rene; a woman does not *enjoy* being thus dominated."

"You are a riddle," said Savorin, with a sigh; "and so is Makofski." And, so thinking, he yet found himself, day by day, loving the one, admiring the other, and instinctively trusting both.

* * * * * *

For two or three weeks after Makofski became identified with the revolutionists all went smoothly, or so it seemed. Miles La Croix grew daily more gracious to Rene, and more dependent upon Makofski. Crashaw turned surly and held aloof; but Lugos, after a suitable interval of reserve, seemed to have been touched by the tidal wave of attraction setting so strongly toward Captain Fernand, and began to unbend, to seek his society, and to find pleasure in it. Apparently he had accepted this new co-worker without reservation, and trusted him fully. He talked very freely of the "cause" and its prospects, of his hopes and plans; and even whispered some secrets, that were known only to a trusted few.

As for Makofski, he received all this as a matter of course, as only his due; and met M. Lugos half-way at all points.

All this Rene saw, wondered at, and duly reported to the Princess, who confessed herself puzzled and not too well pleased.

"What can Lugos mean?" she wondered.

"As regards Makofski?"

"Yes."

"Mischief, no doubt; but of what nature I can't even guess. Do you advise me to warn Makofski?"

"Do you mean against Lugos?"

"Of course."

She pondered a moment. "I think the man may be trusted to read M. Lugos," she said; "but if anything occurs, if you discover any treachery meditated towards him, you must at once inform *me*."

"You?"

"I."

"And *not* Makofski?"

"Myself first."

* * * * * *

For two or three weeks following the murder of poor Hovey the papers kept up a running comment upon the case, sometimes they reported the police as upon a 'hot scent,' only to modify or utterly deny the same in the next issue. Sometimes they theorised, sometimes they flouted the police. At last, one morning this paragraph appeared:

"After following up many false clues, and working out and proving the impracticability of many theories, the police have settled down to the following, for which there is only presumptive evidence. It is now believed that the man Hovey, who was an Englishman, and who had only been a year in America, was murdered by an enemy, who followed him across the water for this purpose, and who may, by now,

be *en route* again for England. There are numerous small circumstances that, woven together, furnish the beginning of a chain of evidence in favour of this theory. It is said that the police have abandoned some of the old trails, and a new search will be prosecuted on the other side of the water."

On the evening of the day that saw this paragraph in print there was a council at Miles La Croix's. The "group," after many days of inaction, had decided to resume the aggressive. When the council broke up, which was not until a late hour, Makofski, who had been carrying on an animated discussion with Dr. Lugos, accompanied him to the vestibule entrance and looked out. The night was fine, and he was not inclined to sleep, he said. Besides, he had been indoors all day. He took his hat, coat, and a slender cane, and went out into the street with Lugos; Crashaw and Rene Savorin had gone on before. The two men went forward slowly, conversing with animation, Lugos leading the way, and his companion seemingly heedless whither he went, until they found themselves in a somewhat shabby and dimly-lighted quarter, and Lugos himself called a halt.

"I am taking you too far," he said, "and this is not a pleasant part of the city. I know it, and only cross it as the nearest route to a quiet little avenue beyond. Can you find your way back?"

"Easily," replied Makofski, with confidence, and after a few more words the two separated; Makofski retracing his steps and going leisurely back as he came, swinging his cane as he walked. Once or twice he looked behind him in the direction taken by Lugos. The first glance showed that personage crossing the street at a rapid pace, at the second he had passed out of sight.

It was a quiet neighbourhood, the street seemed deserted, only now and then was the stillness broken by sound or movement. But, by and by, the noise of wheels moving swiftly struck his ear; they were behind him and coming nearer. Some belated cab, of course. It came yet nearer, and then the rattling wheels seemed to revolve more slowly; arrived at its destination perhaps; but, no, the noise did not cease altogether, the cab came on slowly, slower yet, until it was just opposite him, at a point where two tall buildings, one on either side of the way, faced each other, and blended their grim shadows, making a bridge of intense darkness where they fell. Into this shadow pedestrian and cab passed together, then the rattle of the wheels told of an increased pace. Something shot forward in the darkness just behind Makofski. There was a dull sound as of a blow —a sharp exclamation; another sound, this time a blow unmistakably, then the noise of running; a sharp but low call; the slam of a carriage door; then wheels again, rolling swiftly now down the street, round a corner—away.

This is what has happened in a moment, in less time than it takes to tell it. Captain Fernand, walking listlessly, with seeming carelessness, thinking, who knows what, but with head erect, eyes and ears alert, in spite of his listless gait, grasping his slim cane firmly, and, as he steps into the deep shadow, letting it glide through his deft fingers until he holds it reserved, gripped by the ferrule end as one would grip a sword when waiting the attack; hears a slight sound

behind him, swerves a little to the inner side, and turns—turns just in time to receive a blow, swiftly and strongly dealt, directly upon the head. One blow and then another, then, with a cat-like spring, someone is upon him, and there is the gleam of a knife in the air. Then the arm of Captain Fernand rises and descends *once*, a whizzing sound, a blow, a howl of pain, then the pursuer becomes the pursued. The man who had thought to fell his victim with his iron-bound bludgeon has thrown it from him and fled, a second blow from the loaded cane falling upon him as he runs. The race is short. It ends in the cab, which has stopped at the moment of attack. In an instant the fugitive is within, the whip descends, the vehicle is away, and Captain Fernand stands looking up and down the street, alone.

Only for a moment, however. He does not linger from hesitation, but to make sure, first that no cab is at hand, and then, that there has been no witness, no observer near. Then he turns, and without so much as a backward glance, resumes his homeward journey.

No one is visible when he reaches the house ; there is no light in the studio, none in the drawing-room. He goes quietly to his own room, and having locked his door and turned on the light, proceeds to examine himself, first his garments. The light top-coat has a long cut in the breast, near the shoulder. He examines the frayed edges critically.

"A keen blade," he mutters, "no common weapon, that. It scarcely touched me, and yet——" Again he ran his fingers along the cut and frayed wool, and then tossed the garment aside, and suddenly held up his right hand, across the back ran a long, thin, red line, from which the blood was just beginning to ooze. "And I never felt *that*," he said, wiping away the drops. "Bah, I wish he had spared me *that*. It will leave a mark for days."

He eyed it ruefully. It was only a scratch, and yet it seemed to cause him actual annoyance. He went at once to his dressing-case, and having washed the scarred hand, he dressed it carefully with a strip of plaster, and then, and not till then, removed the round-topped hat, which had been curiously indented by the blows dealt upon it.

It did not *look* like a bit of armour, no one would suspect, viewing it from the exterior, that it had, perhaps, saved a man's life ; but on closer inspection, it could be seen that it was lined with a framework of woven steel, fine, but firm. The framework was deeply indented, but it had broken the force of the blow.

"Evidently," soliloquized Captain Fernand, "that attack was *meant* for me. It was no chance encounter, and my assailant, I fancy, has the worst of it. Bah ! it was a bungling affair, but it has taught me to sleep with closed doors, and to be on my guard. I am greatly obliged to someone."

It was long past midnight, and a man who had finished his evening with a long walk and an exciting encounter might well be expected to feel fatigued, if not sleepy. But Captain Fernand did not retire. He smoked a cigar instead, and consulted his watch from time to time, like a man about to keep an appointment.

* * * * * *

On the following morning, the Chief of Police found a note upon

his desk, brief, and signed only by a seemingly meaningless flourish. It ran thus, and its effect was to set all the available detective machinery in motion :—

"Look for a physician or surgeon who, since one o'clock this a.m., has been called upon to attend a man—probably small in stature, but very agile and muscular—who has a bruised or broken arm, shoulder, or wrist, probably the right, with perhaps other hurts. *Locate injured man, if possible.*"

CHAPTER LXIII.

A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE.

WHILE Captain Fernand smoked and pondered in his locked room, with the loaded cane, which had served him so well, resting carelessly across his knees, a light form glided down the passage, and started a little, and hesitated, as the gleam of light from above his door struck across her path. Only for a moment, however, there was no sound from within, and this was not the first time that Captain Fernand had been known to "burn the midnight oil," until midnight was long past. So Moina, after listening a moment, went swiftly on through the dusky passage like one who knew her way.

At the door of her father's study she paused again, and looked all about her. All was still, the house seemed sleeping. She opened the door with the key she had taken from her father's room, and which she would replace there when her search was ended, entered, and in a moment had put her hand upon a small lamp, placed there in readiness by herself. In another instant a light, dim, but sufficient for her purpose, shone upon the desk, which she began to unlock with eager, trembling fingers, having procured the key, as usual, from the little cabinet on the opposite wall.

She was not long in finding and examining the books, she had grown used to this now, although, of late, since the introduction of Captain Fernand into the "group," she had been deposed, and her place as secretary and amanuensis given to him, with, on two or three occasions, Savorin as an alternative.

"Ah!" she murmured, half aloud, with her eyes riveted upon a newly written page, "it is *worse* than I thought, far worse! And I am so helpless." She bowed her head upon her hands, and tears trickled through her fingers. She was, for the moment, overwhelmed with a sense of her own weakness. Then, suddenly, she lifted her head, and brushed away her tears. "I am one against them all," she said, "but I will *not* give up!" She caught up a slip of paper, and rapidly copied something from the page before her. Then she drew from her pocket a tiny bunch of keys. She had taken them from beneath her father's pillow that night for the first time.

They fitted into sundry small drawers and snugly contrived compartments, and, as she applied them one after another, her face grew firmer, and her hand more steady.

One by one she read letters and papers, memoranda and notes, and carefully replaced each, read, with a growing horror in her face,

but still resolutely. She had reached the last drawer, and was sitting with half-a-dozen letters laid out before her on the open desk, when a slight sound caused her to start and look suddenly about her. The sound was repeated, and suddenly she bent forward, blew out the light, and, with a swift spring, reached the side of the room farthest from the door, where a tall screen stood, as she herself had placed it, before a window, that no rays from her lamp might shine out upon the street. She had only to move one panel slightly to conceal herself behind it, and even as she did so, she knew that the door was opening slowly, and that someone was within the room. The sounds made by the new comer were slight, but Moina was alert, and listening with bated breath.

Who could it be? Her father? Surely not! Even if he had wakened, which was unlikely, and had chosen to pay a midnight visit to his study, which was improbable, he would hardly have entered like *that!* So stealthily, so lightly! Could it be Margot? What could Margot want here? Was it a burglar, then? or was it—— A sudden light flashing out and illuminating all about her, caused her to start, and almost to cry out. Then suddenly it was withdrawn, and she was left in darkness again.

What did it mean? By standing very erect and slightly raising herself, she could see through the fretted woodwork at the top of the screen, and this she did.

And now the hot angry blood serged up and over cheek and brow; fear gave place to indignation; she clenched her hands, bit her lips, and, for an instant, it seemed as if she were about to spring from her hiding-place and confront the intruder.

Standing near her father's open desk, with a dark lantern in his hand, its light at that moment turned away from her place of concealment, and full upon the desk, stood *Captain Fernand Makofski.*

He wore a dark velvet smoking-coat; a soft silken cap was pulled low over his forehead, and his feet moved noiselessly in Turkish slippers. He was looking about him in the coolest possible manner, but when he had swept the room with his flashing dark lantern, his gaze came back to the open desk, and rested there. Taking in everything, the letters lying thereon; the keys hanging in the lock last opened by Moina; the lamp lately extinguished, and still emitting a faint smoky odour.

He placed his hand upon the lamp, and knew at once that it had just been extinguished.

Seeing this, the blood receded from Moina's face leaving her pale again. But there was no sign that this fact had impressed him; instead, he put down the lantern, turning the open slide, so that its light fell again full upon the desk and its contents. Then he seated himself, and began to glance at the letters one after another. His eyes were keen, his hand was quick, and he had scanned and replaced three of the outspread letters before Moina La Croix could decide upon any course of action. It was only when he had half-risen and placed a hand upon the bunch of keys, that she suddenly dashed aside the screen and flung herself upon him like a young tigress, snatching the keys from his unresisting hand.

"So, sir!" she panted, "Is *this* how you reward hospitality? A spy—*a robber!*"

The man before her did not start; even the expression of his face remained fixed, only his eyes seem to be looking into her very soul.

"Thank you for coming forward," he said, after a moment's silence, "I was beginning to fear that I should be forced to an unpleasant duty."

"A duty!—*you?*" she ejaculated.

"Yes. I feared you were not going to present yourself—that I should be forced to pull away that screen."

Moina was fairly speechless from amazement. Could she believe her ears? Was this man, this midnight intruder, insane? Was he addressing such words, and in that tone, to *her?*—she drew herself up and asked, with less heat, but added dignity,

"What is the meaning of this, Captain Makofski? What right have you with those?" pointing to the desk and the scattered papers. "You—my father's guest."

Still his eyes searched her face. Calmly, coldly, it seemed to her. He let his gaze turn at last from her face to the desk, the open letters, the lately extinguished lamp.

"Miss La Croix, will you—explain *your* presence here?" he said.

"*My* presence! *I*—in my father's house!"

"In your father's study; at midnight, and in the act of searching his desk. The desk which contains not *his* secrets only but documents, letters, memoranda, of vital importance to others. These keys, I know that he keeps them always about him. How did you obtain them? These letters, of a private nature, and concerning the business of the 'circle,' of which your father is the authorized chief? You have called me a spy, Miss La Croix, what is *your* position here and now?"

For a long moment she stood speechless. *She*, who had confronted him as an accuser, stood before him accused; arraigned as a trespasser, in her own house. *She!* Indignation held her breathless and quivering, but too proud to once withdraw her glowing eyes from his face.

Hardly realized though it was, there had been, pent up within her for days, a growing wrath against this man. Instinctive, unreasoning; she felt it now surging up in her soul; gathering strength; causing her heart to throb fiercely; the blood to flow back again to her cheeks; the fire to light her eye. Hot reckless words rose to her lips, but before she could open them, he spoke again.

"Painful as it is to say, I have a duty to perform in this house; because, as you have just reminded me, I am indebted to its master. You have chosen to call me a *spy*, Miss La Croix. Be assured that I am quite able to account, to those who have the *right* to inquire into it, for my presence here. Are you prepared to explain yours? Not to me—but to them."

"To *them!*" Poor Moina! The wrath died out of her face, she began to feel suddenly weak and helpless, a very woman. "To *them!* to whom?"

"To your father. To M. Savorin, to all those whose secrets are

here," putting a hand upon the desk. "*I* am newly made one of them, Miss La Croix. Look at these letters, important documents they are. See these open drawers; these books, these notes, lately taken. The ink hardly dry upon the paper. All this is painful to me. For you are the daughter of my host. A man whom I respect; but, ask yourself, as a man who would be loyal to his cause, *can* I pass in silence this that I have seen here to-night?"

Moina recoiled suddenly from her inquisitor, who had approached closer, as he uttered the words; threw up her hands, and, clasping them before her face, flung herself down upon the low chair usually occupied by her father, when dictating to his amanuensis.

Of all the words he had just uttered, one sentence alone seemed dinning itself into her unwilling ears, "*for* you are the daughter of my host." Nothing more—nothing more; and only a few days since he had asked to be her friend. Had begged for her confidence As the memory of this crossed her mind, a sudden resolve seized. upon her, reckless, foolish, but characteristic, born of humiliation, despair, and the stress of her strange position.

She dropped her hands and turned slowly toward him a face suddenly, strangely, composed.

"Once," she began, "before you took the final step, which made you so stern a guardian over all this," with a gesture toward the desk, "you asked me to trust you, to give you my confidence. Do you remember it?"

"I remember it," he said, gravely, "I *repeat* it."

"You *repeat* it? You! Wait. Do you remember my answer?"

"Yes."

"I said I would *not* trust you, when you had become one of the band against whom I had been speaking; I told you that I hated this cause, to which you have *since* allied yourself. Have you forgotten *that?*"

"No."

"Did you believe me then?"

"Miss La Croix, shall I speak plainly? Do you wish the exact truth?"

"That, or nothing."

"You will remember, then, that I am a man of many experiences, that I have grown accustomed to intrigue in the cause of the revolutionist. That I came among you here a stranger and a fit subject for suspicion, knowing your father as a leader of his party, and having heard of you as being, at least, in sympathy with him, can you wonder greatly if, when I began to think of becoming one of the party, and naturally looking for something in the way of a *test, I*——"

"Stop," she cried suddenly, "I *see* what you mean! You thought me a hypocrite! You thought me an *actress!* You thought I was practising upon you! setting a trap for you, when I declared my hatred and dread and *disillusionment;* when I deplored my father's position and mine——"

"One moment——"

"Oh, I comprehend *now*, and *you*, when you offered me your friendship, when you asked me to trust you, you were just as sincere.

just as honest as you thought *me!* Captain Makofski, I *am* indebted to you for *much!*"

A change had come upon the face of Captain Fernand, the sternness had gone out of it somehow, and while it was still very grave, it was altogether softened.

He seated himself now in the revolving chair before the desk, and turned it toward her.

"I could say much to justify myself," he began, his tone like his face, changed and softened, "but will let that pass; only, when you are alone and quite calm, please think over the past, since our first meeting, your position as it must appear from *my* point of view, and mine, as *you* might see it, and then be just to us both, and *believe* me, whatever may have been my thoughts and suspicions, at a time when I hardly knew you, I am ready to accept your assurance now, to believe anything which I have upon your word. Ours is a strange position, let us forget all that has been said, only let us understand each other. Tell me *why* you are here to-night! answer me one or two questions, and I promise you, that I will leave you here where I found you, and that no word of this encounter shall ever pass my lips."

"And how," she asked with a last flash of fast-dying anger, "can you reconcile this with your duty to *the cause?*"

"If you tell me that you harbour projects injurious to the cause," he said, "I might find myself compelled to take measures to defeat your projects, but I would do it without in any manner betraying you. The cause is so strong, it can afford to deal leniently with a young girl."

"With a young girl, yes; but if that young girl had the strength of an army of a kingdom, she would hurl it *all* against your cause, for hate of it."

"I admire your candour," he said, calmly; "will you not complete the story? You have my word of honour."

"And I am going to test it. I am here to-night, Captain Makofski, because I have learned from a few words dropped, a hint not intended for my ears, that a certain man is to become the subject of your machinations."

"Mine?"

"Pardon, I should have said a 'sacrifice,' to the *circle.* It's the same thing. This man has suffered already at the hands of—the circle, but they are not satisfied yet. I want to save this man; I want to warn him; I have broken his bread. Somewhere in this desk I believed there was a memorandum of instructions, and his present address, which I do not know. I was searching for *these.* Is that enough?" she lifted her face defiantly.

"Not quite, tell me the name of this man."

"That you may thwart me?"

"That I may know the truth. Your story is incomplete without this."

"Promise that you will not interfere, then."

"With whom?"

"With *me.*"

"I promise." She fancied that she detected a smile about his mouth.

"And you will not betray me?"

"I have given you my word."

"The name of this man is *Elias Lord.*"

He made a sudden movement and was silent for a moment, then—

"And *why* do you wish to protect this particular man?" he asked, carelessly.

"Because I have accepted the hospitalities of his house; because he is a friend of *my* friend; because he has suffered enough at the hands of the circle."

"What has he suffered?"

"His life has been attempted, or so I believe."

"In what manner?"

"Have I not said enough?"

"No, answer me." His tone was peremptory now. "I must know."

"In the parlance of the circle, then—*by the knife.*"

Again he was silent a moment, then—

"When was this attempt made?" he asked.

"Less than a month ago."

He drew a quick breath. "And was this attempt 'by the knife' the *first?*" he asked.

"The *first!* Yes, *I* know of no other. Good heavens! you don't mean that they have tried and failed, *before?*"

"I am merely asking for information." He arose quickly, "and I will say no more. And so you avow yourself an enemy to the cause, Miss La Croix? You mean to oppose us, where you can?"

"If it were not for my father," she said, "I would oppose you openly. Oh, how *bitterly* I would oppose you—you and M. Lugos and Rufus Crashaw." She paused suddenly, "Perhaps," she added scornfully, "your duty to the cause will compel you to denounce me to these gentlemen."

"To Lugos and Crashaw? Heaven forbid! it would be to denounce you to the executioner. You have placed your life at my mercy, do you know it? For your own sake, let me implore you not to show yourself to these men as you have shown yourself to *me.*"

"What! you think they would dare harm me—*Me?* Miles La Croix's daughter."

"They dare more than you think. You, who have seen so much, have you not seen that your father is little more than a tool in their hands. If you will not be prudent for your own sake, for your father's sake, have a care, the time may be nearer than you think, when he will need you sorely." He caught up his flickering lantern, he seemed suddenly in haste to terminate the interview.

"It is almost morning, Miss La Croix," he said, "and I will be as good as my word. You and I seem now to be upon divergent paths, but we are not enemies, I trust. Once more, I entreat you to be cautious. Lugos and Crashaw believe you to be warmly interested in all that interests your father. But for this you might find many things most unpleasant. Trust me to keep your secret, and believe me, *in spite of appearances,* I am always yours to command. *Trust* me—*try* me!"

The door opened and closed softly. Moina arose and groped again for her little lamp; lighting it and looking dazedly about her, she

gathered up and replaced letters and memoranda, and, leaving all as she had found it, went back to her own room as softly as she came, wondering if the past half-hour, with its strange events, had not been all a dream. But, no: the light still shone above his door as she glided past it, almost holding her breath.

Once in her own room, she pondered long, and with fast-beating heart, as she recalled his words and hers.

"*What* must he think of me?" she murmured at last. "I called him a robber, a spy. And it is all so simple. He *heard* me and he followed me;" and then, after a time, she added, "He was very generous!"

* * * * * *

"A failure and a success!" said Makofski, as he locked himself once more in his own apartment. At least I know now just what to think of Miles La Croix and his daughter. My position, with reference to *them*, is taken, and will be maintained. So she declares war upon *us*. A brave girl! A brave girl! As for Miles La Croix's famous desk —its secrets are yet to be mastered."

A strange soliloquy, surely. Having indulged in it, Captain Fernand seated himself, lit a cigar, and wrote briskly for a long hour.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A PASSING STRANGER.

CAPTAIN FERNAND was evidently not much impressed by his adventure with the would-be assassin of the bludgeon and the cab. He made no mention of it to his host when the two met at breakfast next morning, although he might easily have done so, for Moina was absent, not even appearing at luncheon.

Possibly he wished to spare his host any uneasiness, or annoyance, upon his account; but when M. Lugos appeared, the two having agreed to meet that morning, he was still silent upon the subject.

M. Lugos had proposed to bring and read to him, for his better understanding of the great question with which they were mutually engrossed, sundry letters and reports from abroad.

Captain Fernand was developing an interest in the general aspect of the question; was, indeed, more eager to know how it was affecting the masses, than to hear of individual efforts, deeds, ordiscipline.

"As a matter of fact, each man *must* work in detail," he would say to M. Lugos; "the workmen who rear a mighty edifice put their hands to a single stone, a single brick, at a time; but when they pause, when they stand back to view the work of their hands, do they say, 'Look, I laid this brick, and this, and this'? No; but, rather, standing back until the individual detail is lost in the grand whole, they say, 'See what *we* have builded; this is the work of our hands.' So, my friend, never mind just what brick you have laid. I am going to work beside you, and soon I shall know enough of that; let us view the unfinished work from afar, let us judge by the outline what the finished whole may be."

All of which was quite satisfactory to M. Lugos. He liked the attitude of Captain Fernand—his lack of curiosity, his lofty disregard for detail; but yet he could not be quite at his ease in the society of the Russian exile.

They spent an hour in reading and discussing the cause, and its probable and possible progress in France and Germany; and when Lugos arose to take his leave, Captain Fernand arose too. "I will walk with you," he said, "and perhaps, as the day is so fine, I can persuade you to lunch with me, somewhere down town."

But M. Lugos said "no" to this. "We will walk together, by all means," he said; "but in an hour I must see a patient."

"Ah! your pardon, I did not know that you practised. I had the idea that it must interfere——" Captain Fernand finished his sentence with a gesture.

"Not at all," said Lugos, negligently; "I call myself an oculist, and hang out my sign. But my practice; a man can hardly help picking up a patient here and there, willingly or unwillingly. Mine, I confess, are, for the most part, charity patients."

"I see," murmured the captain, and the subject was dropped.

When they were a few paces from the house, and sauntering slowly along, Makofski slipped his hand beneath the arm of M. Lugos.

"I have a little thing to tell you," he began, and then broke off suddenly to glance around at a small man of insignificant aspect, and clad in rusty garments, who had just brushed against him rather forcibly. "Well, my man," he said brusquely, "what is it?"

"Eh!" The man looked at him dazedly, and came to a halt. "Uh!" he ejaculated again.

"Do you wish to speak to me?"

"I?" The man turned a look of blank inquiry from Makofski to Lugos, and back to Makofski again.

"You pulled my sleeve," said Makofski, impatiently; "what do you *want?*"

"I." The man began a stream of voluble protestations. "He had not meant to touch him, he did not know that he had; it was the big woman leading the child who had jostled him," etc., etc. He turned in his appeal from his accuser to Lugos, as if to a judge, and continued to protest with his eyes upon his face.

Suddenly Lugos turned away, pulling Makofski after him. "Come," he said; "it's nothing—the fellow has been drinking; but he's quite harmless, to judge from his looks. You'll have a crowd about us. Come along."

Thus appealed to, Makofski consented to turn his back upon the small man, who fell in the rear.

"I am not so sure it was an accident," said Captain Makofski, once more taking his companion's arm. "And you might agree with me if you had heard what I was about to tell you."

"Eh! what's that?" asked Lugos quickly. "What were you about to tell me?"

"Simply this. Last night, after we parted—you and I—I was attacked."

"Attacked!"

"Yes; on the street, by a man, a small man, who followed me in a cab, and took flight in it after he had failed to lay me out, dying or dead, on the pavement."

Lugos was amazed, and was not slow to express his indignation. He asked many questions, and Makofski related his adventure in detail.

"And it was a small man, you think?"

"I am sure of it."

"Did you see his face—hear his voice?"

"Neither."

"Then there is little hope; you would not know him again?"

"I am not so sure of that; we may meet again."

"What! You don't think, surely, that the attack was *meant* for you?"

"Ah, there! That's the question I perpetually ask myself. *Was* it meant for me? If I knew *that*."

"But, man, how can that be? You know so few here! You have seen almost no one except ourselves. Unless, indeed," here M. Lugos laughed softly, "you choose to think that some one of your new associates is already weary of your society."

"My dear sir, that's a sorry jest. I *have* thought that I may have been mistaken for somebody else, that the man with the knotted club attacked *the wrong man*." Makofski was silent. "If I thought that was the case——" He paused, as if considering something.

"Well. If you thought it was the case?"

"I might feel that I ought to report to the police."

"The police!" M. Lugos started. "Then you have *not* reported it to the police?"

"You think that I ought, I see, and perhaps you are right."

"Wait! You are going too fast; there are many things to consider. To complain to the police *might* make you a little too prominent."

"Yes."

"You would be required to give your name, your residence, your occupation, and antecedents;—in short, they must have your biography, and it must be satisfactory."

"I see," doubtfully.

"But that is not all. If the police were reticent—but we are not in Russia, nor in France. What is known to the police here is known to the newspapers, and then you are, indeed, a marked man—at the mercy of the detectives, at the mercy of the reporters. Ah, my poor friend! you have yet to know the American police."

"Heaven forbid!" piously ejaculated Captain Fernand; and when they separated, which was soon, and after a little more discussion of the mysterious attack, they had mutually decided that said attack had been meant for somebody else, and mutually agreed that it should *not* be laid before the police.

As before, they parted at a corner, and as Makofski, with a backward look and a wave of the hand, turned to retrace his steps, some one brushed past him for a second time. This time, too, it was a

small person, and one not too well dressed. But this time, while in size he did not differ from the insignificant person with the shabby clothes, it was a *boy* whose elbow grazed his in passing, a boy wearing a soft *hat* instead of a rusty cap, and with such coat as he possessed rolled into a bundle and carried under his arm.

He did not glance at Makofski, nor did that personage, on this occasion, seem at all disturbed by his nearness; but as M. Lugos moved away, Captain Fernand might have seen, if he had chanced to look after him, that the same gap in the crowd through which the affable physician vanished, also swallowed up the boy with his coat beneath his arm.

In fact, Captain Fernand *did* look around, after he had walked half a block in the direction whence he had come—looked, and then halted. Neither Lugos nor the boy were visible. Captain Fernand smiled behind his bushy beard, walked back to the corner where he had parted from M. Lugos, and where a number of *coupés* were in waiting; glanced about him again, entered one of the *coupés*, and was driven away.

CHAPTER LXV.

AN AMATEUR'S REPORT.

EARLY in the afternoon of the same day, Roger Drexel was standing alone before the large window of his down-town place of rendezvous. He looked thoughtful and somewhat impatient, and he was twisting and twisting a letter between his thumb and finger.

The room bore traces of neglect; there was a coating of dust upon everything, and the air smelled stale, as if it had been for days unopened. Nothing was to be seen in the courtyard into which he seemed gazing, and he did not expect to see anything. It was dark and dingy, and he drew the curtain higher and turned to look about him.

"Odd," he muttered, half aloud. "Ken is usually prompt. I hope this won't last much longer."

He had been waiting half-an-hour for Kenneth Hosmer, and he now seated himself, after dusting off a chair with a month-old-newspaper, and opened the letter which, since his entrance there, he had held crumpled in his hand. It was signed with Kenneth Hosmer's initials, and it ran thus:—

"OLD HEADQUARTERS,—What shall I do with J. P.? I fear he is getting beyond my control. He is going to the deuce daily, and at a furious pace. He is, of course, out of work, and I think even you would be satisfied with his present state of impecuniosity. They are literally penniless, except for my help; and, of course, in my character of liberal fellow-labourer, with but a few dollars laid by, I dare not do more than relieve actual need. Thus far I have obeyed instructions to the letter, but this can't go on much longer. I feel as if I were hounding a fellow-creature on to his own undoing. Parker grows sullen, morose—in fact, unmanageable. He is seeing some queer people, too, and there are some circumstances that should not be com-

municated by letter. Can't you come out from your lair, your veil of invisibility and mystery, and give me half an hour of communion in the flesh? Really, old fellow, *I think it's best so.* Answer me at once—the old stand. Yours *in extremis*,

"K. H."

Drexel smiled as he read the last words and folded up the letter.

"That sounds like Ken at his best," he thought. "He has caught on to something, and is not half so despairing of his own abilities as he would make it appear. This business, after all, may have been good for him."

But here his reverie was interrupted by Ken himself.

At a given signal he was admitted, and for a moment the two looked at each other silently, and with hand grasping hand; then Hosmer spoke.

"Well, Roger, it's awfully hard on a fellow, but I'm going to take you at your word. I'll only ask *one* question: does your work prosper?"

Drexel's face was very grave; he pressed his friend's hand, and turned and drew forward a chair, motioning him to take it, and seating himself in another, before he replied:

"It's more than good of you to take so much upon trust, Ken. But before I answer, I must ask——"

"Well?"

"Do you still think as you did when we talked together last?"

"The day after those rascally Huns so nearly broke my head, you mean? Do you know that was a month ago, old man?"

"I know it—but answer."

"Do I still think that you were right and I wrong? That I was a fool for pulling at the curb when you tried to hold me back! Yes. I think it, and with 'confirmation strong,' and growing daily stronger. Drexel, you saved me from worse than folly; from everlasting self-contempt when you laid your commands upon me, and sent me out to see the monster face to face and in his own den of iniquity. If I were not *convinced* that you knew what you were about, and that *I* didn't, do you suppose I should be following out your instructions, blindly and unquestioningly, at this moment?"

"Not quite blindly, Ken."

"Well, at any rate, it's through a glass darkly. I knew, of course, that you had ceased to believe in the movement, and that you were studying it, trying to get at the heart of it. And it was my belief in your ability to do this, and my faith in your general good judgment, that made me consent to make the test for myself—at first."

"At first—and now, Ken?"

"Now!" He threw down his hat with an impatient gesture. "Don't let us enlarge upon it; call it a case of youth, ignorance, and misplaced confidence: of enthusiasm blind and running a-muck. We've repented, and we're trying to work out our salvation. Isn't that about it?"

Drexel smiled, but the smile quickly faded. "Ken," he said, slowly, as if weighing each word, "if I could have foreseen my

present position when I tried to open your eyes, I am not sure but that I would have left you in ignorance, for, I tell you, here and now, seriously, and without exaggeration, that your present position is a serious one, and it may easily and soon become dangerous."

Kenneth picked up his hat and hung it over one knee.

"Well?" he said, composedly.

"And yet," went on Drexel, "I cannot ask you to retreat, to drop the game now; I cannot *spare* you."

At the first words Hosmer had flushed hotly, but at the last a smile parted his lips.

"*Well!*" he said again.

"Listen, Ken. You have thought that I am making war, single-handed, against this cause that I once believed in, because I have come to think it a menace to right and justice, law and order, a blight upon the working-man and an enemy to family and home?"

"Of course."

"In the beginning that was *true*, but not now. I have taken you into danger, Ken, into the enemy's country, and it is right that I show you *how* dangerous he is. The thing I am fighting *now*—and the thing I ask you to fight, with me, is—*organized assassination*."

"What?"

"A band of murderers, red-handed. *They* are many, and I stand almost alone. I cannot tell you everything, Ken, for the secrets of others are in my keeping. But I will tell you what I may—I will tell you this: the men who are gaining control of the revolutionary movement here and elsewhere, are plotting crimes that, if allowed to mature, will fill a nation with horror, and cause innocent blood to flow."

"Look here, Drexel——"

"Wait! *I know what I am saying.* Do you remember when I came to you after that lecture given by Miles La Croix?"

"Yes."

"Well, keep that date in mind; since that time great progress has been made. Think—what man of wealth in this city, known to you and to me, has been most active, most interested, in working against the socialists?"

"One does not need to think; Elias Lord is the man."

"And Elias Lord's life has been attempted *twice*, has been *taken*, vicariously."

"Man!—what do you mean?"

"Simply that Elias Lord, after narrowly escaping death from an explosion in his own house, was persuaded to go out of town secretly, and for his own safety; and that his footman, Hovey, fell a victim in his stead. Hovey was killed *for* Elias Lord." And then, while Hosmer sat mute with consternation, Drexel drew his chair closer and in a low half-whisper, told hastily and with many needful omissions, the story of Elias Lord's danger, and of his own experience since.

For a long hour the two sat there face to face and close together, the one speaking in low guarded whispers, the other exclaiming, questioning, wondering—scarcely able to contain his surprise, and growing,

as the story reached its end, fairly aglow with excitement, enthusiasm, and nervous energy.

When the story was told, and he stood confessed plain Roger Drexel no longer, but Hurst, the detective, that paragon whose praises had been so often, of old, upon the lips of his unsuspecting friend, the narrator leaned back in his chair and said :

"And now, Kenneth, now when you know that this is *not* mere child's play, tell me, have I drawn too heavily upon your friendship? When in a moment of ennui, of weariness of the flesh, you pronounced your life of little value, and yourself as ready and anxious for any risk so long as it brought distraction, was I wrong in taking you at your word?"

"No," replied Hosmer, the wonder still in his eyes. "No, no!"

"Seeing the risk, understanding the position, do you still wish to go on?"

Hosmer sprang up, overturning his chair in the act.

"Do I wish to go on?" he cried.

"Man alive! You have *stunned* me with all this! I've lost all my bearings; but—*go on*, you say. What have *I done?* What has drunken Joseph Parker to do with all this? What *I* have been doing is mere child's play!"

"I am not convinced of that, and don't ask me for particulars which I can't give, Ken. Our case lies here. Thousands of men, restless and desperate many of them, are banded together; left to themselves, and to their local leaders, they will be turbulent enough, do mischief enough, incite strikes, breed contentions; but without certain bold spirits at their head, the *worst* will, in time, be their own. But *here* lies the danger. Those same bold spirits have lately crossed the seas, to apply here the hideous methods they have perfected over there. They are fast gaining control of these bands of disaffected, clamorous men. Remove those leaders, and the howling multitude becomes a body without brains, striking at random, blindly destroying itself. Ken, if those leaders are not disarmed, rendered harmless, powerless, another new year will see this city, and *other cities*, ruined, laid waste, the scenes of riot, plunder, bloodshed. The work is going on slowly, but none the less surely, and a dozen of our best men to-day—bankers, manufacturers, railway kings—men who represent millions, and employ hundreds of labourers, stand *condemned* by these councils of blood and dynamite; they are their property."

"Good heavens! But I believe it. I believe all you say. My eyes have been opening slowly. And against all this—great powers above, man!—*what* is to be done?"

Drexel got up, walked to the door and opened it, looked out into the passage, closed and secured it firmly, and came back to his place.

"The police——" began Hosmer.

"The police are warned," broke in Drexel; "but the police can do nothing here. Any open attack, any *sensation*, will only precipitate disaster."

"What can be done, then?"

"Simply this—*only* this. *Four men* at the least, a round dozen

at the most, must be rendered harmless *in some way*, *before another month has rolled over our heads*."

"*Rendered harmless?* But how?"

"Don't ask me. Somehow—*anyhow*."

"Four of these men, *the* four *I* undertake. It will be a struggle between us, but I do not despair of success. The *others*, if others there are, I shall leave to the police." Suddenly he threw out his hand as if casting aside the whole subject.

"Let us say no more of this. Perhaps you can guess now what my interest in this Joseph Parker means. Tell me about him. Answer my questions, and don't question back. Not now. You wrote me a strange letter—why?"

Hosmer was serious enough now. There was no trace of the lightness, the whimsicality shown in his letter, as he turned his eyes upon his friend's face, and studied it like one who finds strange new words suddenly blazoned forth upon an old and long familiar page.

An hour ago, before he knew that Drexel and Hurst were one, he would have told his story with airy embellishments, with quip or light satire, now he addressed himself to Hurst, the detective, simply, concisely, like a subordinate making a report.

"Parker has been going from bad to worse," he began, "and of late I have kept very close at his heels. I think now that it might have been better if I had kept him constantly under my eye; but you did not direct me to do *that*."

"No, and I hardly see how you *could* have done so. The man seemed very ready to suspect espionage, I thought."

"Yes; but he has no longer the least doubt where I am concerned. I have more of his confidence than anyone, much more than even his wife, poor soul. But he still clings to his great secret, the secret that in some way concerns, I am confident, the brotherhood with which he was once identified. Something lies heavy on his conscience. He lives in fear and dread of something, and it has driven him to drink."

"You think so?"

"Beyond a doubt. Now *this* is what I wanted to tell you. He has met someone lately whom he knew in one of his lodges, and I've barely saved him from committing a piece of high-handed outlawry."

"So bad as that?"

"You shall judge. Of course, I did not come by this knowledge all at once. I had to manage him very carefully, and profess to any amount of lawlessness on my own part. He had to get very desperate and very drunk, in my society of course, before it came out. But he wanted a 'pal,' and *had* to fall back upon me, after he had struggled, been tempted, yielded, and finally screwed his courage to the sticking point. His pockets were empty, the rent was overdue, and I thought it best, for once, to have no money. *Then* it came out. Somebody has asked him to waylay and assault a man."

"Ah! The details."

"Are these, briefly. There is a man, I don't know who, is to be '*intimidated*.' The plan was all arranged for us. We, Parker and I, were to post ourselves at a certain shadowy street corner, and there await the coming of two men. One of them was to wear an unmis-

takable hat, and a certain foreign-looking cloak, a sort of military cloak."

"Eh!" Drexel started suddenly, and then said as the other paused, "Go on; it grows interesting."

"This hat and cloak were to be shown to Parker, so that he might be able to identify the parties. *I* was not to be let into that part of it."

"I see—go on," impatiently.

"The encounter might occur on any one of three nights, it was thought. Our instructions were simply to wait at this corner until our men appeared. In the meantime a cab would be stationed close at hand, the driver to be a *safe* man."

"Yes, yes!" Drexel's hands were working nervously.

"According to our programme our two men were to separate at this corner. He of the cloak and hat would go unmolested on his way, the other we were to follow."

"And assault?"

"And assault with bludgeons, in a shady and quiet spot, of course, while the cab crept along at our heels, ready to carry us safely away when the work was done."

"Well—go on, man! Was this fine programme carried out?"

"Not by us. I pretended to agree with everything, and when the time came we were on the spot, or near it. I had plied Joseph, and mixed his drink in such a way as to make him a good deal more than half sick. Then I volunteered to reconnoitre, leaving him in a convenient stairway. I came back to him with a fine story of policemen on the watch, reported an imaginary conversation, told him that our plan must have been in some way discovered, and got him off the scene of action before the man of the hat and cloak made his appearance."

"Ken," cried Drexel, starting up, "*when* did this happen?"

"Night before last."

"And was that the *first night* of your watch?"

"Yes."

"And last night? Were you on guard again?"

"No, Parker had weakened, and did not show himself at the rendezvous, and this brings me to the business of my note. Knowing the hour for the rendezvous was past, I left Parker for the night. When I saw him again the tempter had done his work. Last night, or this morning, he had sought Parker at his own home. They had met before by appointment, and in an old tenement, with two or three rickety entrances, and swarming with people, where, in spite of all my efforts, I had never succeeded in obtaining a glimpse of the man who is bribing him to crime. The case must have grown urgent, for the man came openly to his door, got him out of bed and into the street."

"Stop—at what hour was this?"

"Between two and three o'clock."

"This morning?"

"This morning."

"Go on."

"As nearly as I could gather from Parker's talk, the man began

by berating him for not being at hand the previous night, told him that our watch and our alarm of the first night was quite needless, and finished by making a new plan."

"A *new* plan?" eagerly.

"Yes. It is to be tried again in a different way; and now I want your instructions. *This* time the victim is to be decoyed somewhere and attacked when quite at our mercy. It's a diabolical plot! What am I to do? Some man's life is in danger. How can he be saved—be warned? Have I not played the ruffian a little too long?"

"Is the thing decided?"

"Quite."

"And Parker consents?"

"Parker has lost his head. Some new and strong argument has been used to bring him into complete subjection. He seems doggedly determined this time, and keeps his resolution strengthened with much whiskey. The fellow gave him money, and promises to send him out of the city as soon as the deed is done. To make his fortune, in short."

"Kenneth," said Drexel, after a moment of silence, "you must carry this thing through."

"*What?*"

"You must help Joseph Parker to earn his reward."

"But—Drexel——"

"Listen to me! If you mean to stand by me, *now is your time.* I am playing a desperate game and I *may* fail. But my plans are well laid. You *must* stand by me now, Ken. What I have learned through you—and others, leads me to believe that this man Parker may prove valuable to me. Do not let him out of your sight; don't interfere with him; let him mature his plans, and agree to anything that he proposes—only—*be sure and keep me fully informed.*"

"Old man," said Hosmer, putting a hand upon his friend's shoulder, "I see more clearly, moment by moment, that you are running into danger. Taking a fearful risk, and taking it almost alone. Why must *you* do this? Why not turn these men, these villainous alien leaders, over to the police and the public; let *them* deal out justice—*can't* it be done?"

"*No.* And if it could be done, don't you see the sure result? Say we arrest these men; there is a great trial, a monstrous exposure; all the country is aflame, accused and accusers, each have their following. Suppose, even, that we *succeed*, that the men are condemned and punished. What do they then become in the eyes and the memories of their disciples? Heroes, martyrs! whose work indeed may have fallen from their hands, but whose baleful influence goes on and grows and increases. *No;* that must not be! These men must be *crushed*, driven out ignominiously; made to drop their weapons and vanish into obscurity! To make public examples of such men is simply to give to the rabble they controlled a strengthened cause and a new rallying cry. It has always been so; consult your history."

"Oh, you are *right* enough," sighed Hosmer, "and so I must go on with the game? Turn garrotter. And how far must the game be played *this* time?"

"To the end, or until it is taken out of your hands. Lure your victim to his rendezvous and leave the rest to me."

"And *you* will be there *yourself!*"

"Never doubt it. Never fear for that; as surely as your victim is there, *I* will be there, too."

"Remember this, Roger, Parker is a giant in strength, do not underrate the power of the man. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime, Ken—try—try to see the man who is urging him on to this. See him or learn his name. Double your vigilance; *it is most important!*"

CHAPTER LXVI.

WHAT LITTLE HANS REMEMBERED.

"WELL, my boy, here I am at last. Have I kept you waiting?"

"It don't a-count, cap'n. I've done longer waits nor this; *I* was here on time, though."

"Well I did my best, little chap, and I'm in great haste. Come, now, what have you got to tell me?"

It was early dusk, and the man and boy met and halted close beside the dark stone wall upon the shadowy corner of a quiet street, not far from the hospital where little Frank Price was slowly drifting out from the land of the known.

The man was Roger Drexel, and the lad was Johnny Deegan, the one-time bootblack of Court and Laffin corners. It was not their first meeting, since the night when Johnny had joyously thrown aside his bootblack's box and embarked upon the career of an amateur detective. He had met Roger Drexel more than once, sometimes in one place sometimes in another, and always, as at present, in the open air. His reports had always been brief but sufficient, and he had been a thoroughly devoted and tireless seeker after information, if not, up to the present time, a successful one.

Days had dragged themselves into weeks since Johnny and the boy Hans had established themselves in the back attic of a neat cottage where they had lived lives of seclusion, looked after, fed, scolded, and indulged in the matter of licence to play noisy games and eat their fill of gingerbread and sugar cookies, by the wife of none other than Officer Bates, who shared with his discreet spouse the knowledge that this boy Hans was a precious guest, and one who must upon no account be lost sight of.

With the care of the two boys, and the safe keeping of little Hans, the duties of Officer and Mrs. Bates ended. Upon Johnny Deegan devolved the task of drawing from the sorely-frightened and obstinately-uncommunicative little fellow the secret that Drexel hoped and believed would aid him much in unravelling the tangle to which he had set his hand.

It had not been difficult to manage little Hans. He had never been taught to read, and when, one morning, while he was anxiously waiting for Johnny to come and lead him into the presence of that generous employer who was to provide them both with a profitable

and fascinating "job," the artful Johnny came in with a scared and lugubrious face and a newspaper hidden under his jacket, he fell an easy victim to the story that Johnny, but *not* the newspaper, told.

Poor little Hans was "A hunted man," so Johnny said. He had been advertised for by—who knew whom—advertised as a runaway with a very black character. And, in proof of all this, Johnny produced the newspaper, which was as Hebrew to little Hans, and read therefrom the luridly-worded advertisement, even pointing to certain big black headlines, with finger almost as black, as further corroborative evidence.

Little Hans was crushed, and it was not difficult, after that, to keep him in hiding. If from time to time Johnny thought he detected signs of restlessness, a fresh scare, in the shape of an old woman seen lurking about the vicinity, or an old man, who inquired up and down the street for a runaway boy, was introduced.

Once he had found it needful to call in Officer Bates, who, from his fund of anecdotes, supplied such harrowing details concerning the treatment of sundry runaway boys who had been recaptured, through the aid of the police, that Hans once more became as wax in Johnny's hands.

Indeed, in order to conceal from the boy the fact that Bates was himself a member of that dread force, the worthy man invariably put off his uniform before entering his own door, to the strong distaste of Mrs. Bates, who regarded her lord's uniform much as a society lady might her husband's dress-coat.

All these fragments of daily history, and many more, had been duly related to Drexel by the lively Johnny at their various meetings; but on this occasion there was a new look in the boy's eyes, and an air of suppressed excitement visible in the very angle at which his cap was perched above his freckled nose.

"*Lots!*" Johnny whispered shrilly, in answer to Drexel's query. "Dead loads, you jest bet. We'll have ter go summers."

"Come, then." Drexel turned promptly and lead the way down the street and into a little restaurant, where hot sausage was supplied "at all hours." "We can talk comfortably here," Drexel said, conducting the boy to a secluded corner, and calling for a heaping plate of the hot and odorous edible. "Now, then, Johnny, talk first, eat later."

"All right, boss. I reckon w'at I've got ter relate 'll give *ye* an appertite, too." Then, pulling himself up so as to rest his elbows upon the table, in the attitude most affected by the hot sausage *habitués*, he whispered, "I've got it out of him."

"Good!"

"Yes, *sir!* he's told the whole business. It's that last fake of mine did it."

"What *was* your last fake?"

"Oh, a racket I give him about an old codger as was arrested and locked up in the jug, fer crackin' a little chap over the crown. I made him look as near's I could like the old chap I seen on the corner, ye know, an' Hans jest *bit* on it! Ye see, he felt so good to think the old feller was in hock, for he was dead sure it must be him,

that he finally braced up and told me the *hull* story. After that, cap'n, it didn't take me so very long to persuade him that if he'd tell it ter *you*, you'd see him safe out of it."

"Oh! so you want *me* to see him?"

"Wall," helping himself to a smoking sausage, "that's fer *you* to say."

"Tell me the story, Johnny. We can go to Hans afterwards, if it seems best."

Johnny's version of little Han's story was unique, told, as it was, between bites of sausage and rye bread; and Drexel heard it attentively and with few interruptions. When all was told the two went together to the Bates's cottage, and Drexel held his first interview with little Hans, who soon ceased to fear him, and was gradually won to talk freely and to answer readily.

The boy was a singular mixture of shrewdness and innocence, and his story the pathetic tale of a young child-life cut off from all childish pastimes and pleasures, shut in a prisoner, almost, with only the companionship of an old woman and a few associates like her, taught to serve his master, the little old man whom he had feared and obeyed, and always and everywhere beaten, starved, intimidated, until he became little less than a poor little bundle of abject servility.

"All that is over, my boy," said Roger Drexel, and then, seeing the boy's growing confidence in himself, he approached the subject of his keenest interest. "I want you to tell me more about the things you did for that old man, Hans. What did you call him?"

"Tansig; but sometimes Gran, and some of the others called him *the Spider*."

"Well, Hans, tell me all about Frank Price, the flower-boy."

The boy's face blanched.

"Oh, sir, if you please——"

"Tut, tut. Nobody is going to blame *you* for Frank's hurt. You see, I know all about it. How did you happen to be at hand that day—the day you met him carrying the flowers?"

"Why that just *happened*, truly, sir. I was hangin' about, an' bein' so uste to watchin' things, I s'pose that's how I happened to see the name on the basket."

"Yes, but how came you to be watching? You had the little box with you, the one you left on the table with the flowers. Did they tell you to leave it there *that day?*"

"Why, sir, you see I had been trying for two or three days to git it into the house, and they was pretty mad 'cause I didn't git no good chance, and then, that morning, he said—the Spider did—that I'd *got* to do it that day. He said there would sure be a way for me, 'cause there was a party, and I could slip in behind somebody, and say it was somethin' dropped if I was noticed."

"Why did you not ring and give it to the servant?"

"'Cause I was forbid. I was to git in somehow and jest put it on to the table."

"Stop. How did you know about the table?"

"Why, *he* told me."

"The Spider?"

"Um-hu."

"He knew about the big table in the hall, and he knew there was to be a party. How did he know about these things? Was he ever in that house?"

"I don't know." The boy looked perplexed. "He had lots of ways. Somebody or other was watching that house a good while. Sometimes it was Gran, sometimes it was some of the Knights——"

"The Knights?"

"That's what gran called 'em. She said some day *I'd* be one."

"Oh! go on, Hans."

"Sometimes the Spider hisself kept watch, and sometime, t'ords the last, *I did.*"

"Oh, *you* did? Were *you* ever inside that house, Hans?"

Again the boy flushed, and paled, and hesitated.

"Don't be afraid, boy. You were not to blame, answer me. Were you ever there before?"

"Before—oh—yes. I was—once."

"Tell me about it."

"You are sure, sir. You won't lock me up for it?"

"I wont lock you up for *anything*, except refusing to tell me the truth."

"Once—one night, a good while ago, we went there, the Spider and Big Joe, and me——"

Drexel started, and seemed about to ask another question then. "Go on," he said, shortly.

"We went late. It was a dark night. The Spider had some tools an' keys an' things. We went around to the back door, and the Spider got the door open somehow. There was a little door, ye know, like they have sometimes so'st everybody can't come right in——"

Drexel nodded.

"Well, it was like that; an' the Spider got it open, and he made me git through in the dark, and find the bolts an' pour some oil on 'em, and then slide 'em back, so that Big Joe could come in."

"Didn't the Spider go in, too?"

"No; only as fur as the door. Big Joe had a peek-a-boo——"

"What?"

"A lantern, you know; a *dark* 'un."

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"Well; he had *that*, an' he went into the house, an' we waited outside till he come back ag'in."

"How long did you wait?"

"Oh. It seemed a good while. The Spider got pretty fidgety."

"Now, Hans. I want you to think. What did they say, the Spider and Big Joe, before Joe went inside the house?"

"Why, not very much. The Spider told him to go ahead. He told him about the stairs, and jest how to git to a room upstairs; and he says, 'Everybody's away but *him*, you'll find it a baby's job,' and I 'member Big Joe swore an' said, 'anyhow, it was the last job they'd git out of *him*.'"

"And afterward—when Joe came back?"

"*Then* the *Spider* says, 'Is it done?' and Big Joe swore ag'in, an' says, 'Yes. Let's git out o' here quick."

For a moment Drexel sat silent and thoughtful, then—

"Tell me about this Big Joe, my boy," he said. "How did he look?"

"Oh; he was tall an' strong, sir, as big as you, or bigger; and he had good-looking eyes, and lots of hair on his face."

"Did he have any kind of mark or scar? Think, now—on hands or face?"

Hans pondered. "Why, yes; now I remember," he said, "There was a thing, a wart, or no, a *mole*. Gran said it was a mole, a big one."

"Where?"

"Right here." The boy lifted his hand and rested one thin finger upon his temple, just above the cheek bone.

"Are you *sure?*" cried Drexel. "Was it on that side?"

"Yes. Jest there."

Drexel got up and walked to the window, looking down into Mrs. Bates's diminutive back yard. There was a gleam of excitement in the eyes hidden behind the benevolent glasses, which he wore always in his meetings with Johnny Deegan.

"Ah!" he was saying to himself, "*this* is more than I expected. More, and better! Can it be that this small Hans is to show me the way to the end of this miserable coil." He turned suddenly and addressed himself again to the boy. "Hans, your memory seems good, try to think, *when* did this happen, this visit—this *first* visit of yours with the Spider and Big Joe, to that house on the Avenue? In what month?" and then as the boy hesitated, "was it warm? was it cold? was it spring or winter?"

Hans brightened. "I know now," he said, "it was winter—the end of winter. 'Cause there was a little snow that night, and I caught cold, and the next day it snowed ag'in, and then it never snowed any more; it got warm and sunny right off. I *remember* that much."

"Ah!" said Drexel, half to himself—"*I* remember. *That was in February.*"

Again he turned to the window, this time he stood there for some moments, consulting a small book of memoranda, which he drew from his pocket. Finally he turned to the boy, Johnny Deegan.

"Johnny, my man," he said, as if addressing a familiar spirit. "Won't you just run down into that backyard there, and see, if by any chance, anyone is hanging about the alley who hadn't ought to be?"

Johnny was off at once, swelling with importance. *He* had not found the dialogue very interesting. Drexel himself closed the door behind him and then came close to Hans.

"Now, Hans, be quick. Let's get it over before Johnny comes back. Tell me about the *next* time you went to that house, *after* you left the flowers?"

"Eh!" The boy started.

"There was *a new door*, you remember, and you had to be put through the transom; *who was with you that night?*"

But now the boy sprang up white to the lips. "Oh!" he cried, "*how* did you know about *that?*"

CHAPTER LXVII.

CRASHAW'S LAST CARD.

"AND that is your last word, La Croix?"

"It is—on that subject."

They were face to face in the old man's studio. La Croix erect in his long artist's gown, and Crashaw, as on a former occasion, when the two had chanced to disagree, occupying a low chair, and crushing his soft hat between his strong ungraceful hands.

"I have promised to speak with the girl, and I have done so," La Croix went on, "she refuses—utterly. She will not hear of it."

"She might," said the other, bitterly, "if she knew it was your wish."

"Crashaw," the old man flung down his brush with an impatient gesture, "have done with this! I told you that I believed my girl had already chosen, but I was willing to present your suit, even to urge it. This I did. I might repeat her words—they were not pleasant. When I ventured to urge your suit, according to my promise, she defied me openly. For the first time in her life, my daughter defied me."

"Did you command her, then?"

"She so construed my speech."

Crashaw arose, and shook himself like an angry dog. "If *I* had seen her," he said, half to himself.

"Do you *wish* to see her? To hear from her own lips——" he paused, the two faced each other.

"Yes," said Crashaw at last, "I wish it, if I may see her alone."

"You may, now, at once. I will send for her."

"Perhaps she will refuse," sneered Crashaw.

For some days a new change had been making itself apparent in the manner of Miles La Croix. He was less taciturn, and more testy. He talked more, but with the tone of a dictator. Argument, opposition, seemed to arouse in him a certain irritable antagonism. His manner and speech, in short, had become excitable, ill-balanced, intolerant to the utmost. These last words of Crashaw aroused him to wrath.

"She shall *not* defy me twice," he said, grimly. "Wait you here, I myself will send her to you." And he strode from the studio, the long folds of his velvet gown swayed by the vigour of his movement.

"Moina," he said, coming unceremoniously into his daughter's presence, "Rufus Crashaw is in the studio. Go to him *at once*, and *answer* the questions he will ask you."

Moina arose, and looked for a long moment into her father's face, noted the glitter of the eyes, the flush upon the cheek, and the restless working of the thin hands, as he stood before her.

For a moment it seemed that she was about to speak, to rebel, then she bowed, passed by him, and went down to the studio with head erect.

Crashaw was still standing when she entered, and he faced her with something of surprise upon his countenance, something of satisfaction, too.

She came in swiftly, closed the door, and confronted him with head haughtily poised.

"You wished to speak with me?" she said, icily.

He bowed, and for a moment surveyed her silently.

Since the night of her father's illness, when he had forced himself into her presence, and warned her of the danger of admitting strangers to the sick-room, these two had not spoken, had never once met face to face. And his first thought now, as he gazed upon her, was for the change, which he recognized instantly. He could neither describe nor define it, had he wished. Yet he felt it, and found himself instinctively altering his mental attitude. In his mind were certain utterances, clearly defined phrases, prepared, and even rehearsed for her benefit. He had felt that they were forcible, and had not doubted their instant effect, when she should have heard them. In more senses than one, he was a heavy man, slow to evolve a thought, and slow to shift a mental attitude.

He had been prepared for an angry outburst, for some girlish upbraiding perhaps, for tears, and then for entreaties.

He had looked for a highly-strung, over-wrought girl. What he saw was not a girl, but a woman.

He had expected to see her enter with anger in her eyes, and scorn upon her lips. She stood before him icily indifferent.

He was seized with a vague uneasiness, and his first words were not those he had intended, although, like hers, they were sufficiently to the point.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I wished to see you—to ask you why you will not even listen to me?"

"I *am* listening to you."

"But never till now. Why have you refused to receive me again and again?"

"Since you insist upon hearing it—because your company, your conversation, were not agreeable to me."

"Since when?" He was striving to keep back the signs of rising temper.

"Since it was first addressed to me personally."

"Are you sure of that? I have known the time, in England, when you greeted me with a smile and a hand clasp, when you gave me tea with your own hands, and conversed with me."

"As my *father's* guest, *not* mine."

Just here his anger mastered his prudence. The argument prepared, and relied upon as likely to win a most favourable hearing, was flung aside in an excess of rage.

"I am not blind," he cried, coming closer to her, and glaring into her face, "I am *not* blind; I have not been from the first. *Once* you might have listened to me. If I had spoken then."

"Never!" she flashed out, without receding an inch from her place.

"But lately, since then, you have found another, younger than I—handsomer. You think he cares for you, that you will win him! Little you know him!"

"*Stop*," she cried. But he raged on.

"I could tell you where he goes when he turns away from this house. There are other black eyes than yours! Ah, you are angry now, but it is not worth while. I know the idea that is in your mind, and your father's."

"My *father's?*" she cried, sharply.

"Yes, your father's. *He* was good enough to hint to me, gently, ah, *very* gently, that Rene Savorin was, in your eyes, a better man than I."

A swift change came over her face. The waves of scarlet, the blaze of anger receded. She became suddenly calm, and a smile relaxed the corners of her mouth. He noted the change, and stopped suddenly.

"Well," he said, finally, "have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing," she replied, composedly.

"You confess, then, that you prefer Savorin. That he stands between us."

"The whole world, and all in it, stands between us, Rufus Crashaw. As to Rene Savorin—yes, I do prefer him to you, *infinitely*."

"What! You admit it?"

"I admit it. Now and always."

"And you believe in him, of course?" he sneered. "I think you may have heard of Madam Orloff?"

"Madam La Princess Orloff? I have *seen* her, and I do not fear her, nor *any* woman where Rene Savorin is concerned."

The man before her clenched his hands, and the great veins stood out upon his temples like whipcords. He saw in a flash his utter defeat, and, biting his lips to stifle the imprecation that arose upon them, he turned from her and paced the length of the room over and over again.

He was struggling for self-mastery. If he failed of that, his defeat was utter indeed, and his hold upon this haughty girl was altogether lost.

She made a movement as if to go, and he put up his hand and said, hoarsely,

"One moment—wait." To his surprise, she crossed the room and calmly seated herself near a window overlooking the street.

Since her father had bidden it, she would hear him out, she was saying to herself proudly. She was not afraid, and she would not run away.

Again, and yet again, he paced the length of the room, forcing back the ever-rising wrath, and trying to readjust his plan of attack. He must keep his hold, such as it was, upon this father and daughter, and strengthen it as he could. And he had yet another card to play.

When he finally turned towards her, and approached the window where she sat, he was master of himself, prepared to play his part, and to redeem himself, in his own eyes, at least. He drew forward a chair, and standing beside it, spoke:

"What I now wish to say does not concern myself, nor you, so much as it does your father. May I sit?"

She nodded silently, her eyes upon his face, coldly alert.

"If your answer to-night had been different," he said quietly, "I

need not have pained and troubled you as I now must. If the right had been given me to protect and care for you and yours, I might, perhaps, have found a way." He paused, and looked at her fixedly, and then said, abruptly, "You are impatient, I will come to the point, blame yourself if it seems too abrupt. Your father, Miss La Croix, is in great danger."

She started slightly, controlled herself on the instant, and continued to gaze at him with cold disdain.

"You do not believe me, but the proof is only too clear; you cannot doubt, if you would, when once you have heard. I repeat it, your father is in danger, imminent danger."

"Of what?"

"Of arrest, at the least."

"Oh!" she gave an impatient shrug, "as a conspirator I suppose."

"As a *murderer*."

He has roused her at last, she turns upon him with blanching face.

"Man, you are *vile*, if you are saying this to terrify me!"

He forces back a triumphant smile, at last his moment has come. She will listen to him now.

"I wished to spare you this," he said smoothly, "but no more of that. Do you remember a night, weeks ago, when your father went out alone and late, for the first time after his illness? I called to see him but he was gone, and he did not return until long after midnight."

She caught her breath quickly and suppressed the cry that rose to her lips.

"I see, you *do* remember," he said.

"Go on," she whispered. "What is it, the worst?"

"You were hardly yourself for some days after," he went on relentlessly. "You had shut your door against me, but you could not keep me from knowing whatever I wished to know about *you*. You were restless for many days. That night, the night of your father's mysterious absence, *there was a murder*, so-called, *in a house on Fifth Avenue*."

She uttered a shrill cry and sprang to her feet, but he put out his hand ,and something in his look and gesture checked the mad words that arose to her lips.

"Wait," he said, "hear me out, and don't say something that you may regret, something which will make it impossible that I should be your friend, at least."

"My *friend!*" she gasped.

"All of that. Listen, you knew of that midnight excursion, you knew of the catastrophe of that night, and you, in some manner, connected the two. *How* you came by that connecting link, I confess I do not quite understand; I must ask you to tell all you know of that business, it is best that we understand each other."

But Moina had recovered herself, she was on her guard once more.

"When I have heard what *you* know of that, perhaps," she said quite firmly, "certainly not before."

He smiled grimly, and his answer surprised her.

"As you please, it will not take long. Your father was *seen* to go to that house on Fifth Avenue. The murder occurred, so the coroner's

experts decided, at or near twelve o'clock. It was *just a few minutes later* that he *was seen to leave that place.*"

"Who saw him?" gasped Moina. "Was he followed? Was he spied upon?"

"He was *seen*, that is sufficient ; and now for your statement."

"I will make it as you have made yours. I have acted as my father's secretary. I knew that the name of the man, whose house you say he visited, was on the list of the enemies of the circle, I drew my inferences."

He looked at her steadily for a moment.

"You are not wholly frank with me," he said, "but let that pass. What I wish to say is this, your father is in danger here ; it has been given out that the search for the one who killed Lord's footman has been abandoned altogether, or carried over to England. That is not true, it is a trap. Do you know what I have discovered within the last few days?"

Moina shook her head, and dropped weakly back into her seat.

"This house is being watched, day and night."

"Oh!" she cried, and then closed her lips again.

"I don't mean to alarm you needlessly, but you can see that something must be done. As yet they may have only a suspicion, but I ask you, What would be the result if your father were arrested and accused? could we rely upon his prudence, his nerve? He is, as you must have seen, in a peculiar mental condition."

Suddenly Moina threw out her hands and checked him by her gesture. "What does all this lead to," she asked wearily; "why this multiplication of words? Do you mean to denounce him, to give him up? do you want *me* to buy his safety, his life, with mine?"

"Would *you?*" asked the man quickly.

"With my *life*, yes," she said.

For a moment their eyes met, then he said, with a marked change of tone and manner,

"I want to throw these spies off the track and insure his safety, that is all."

"Ah!"

"And this cannot be done without your help."

"Go on."

"He does not know that he is being watched, that he is suspected. We have thought it best, for many reasons, that he should not know. Do you not agree with me?"

"He *must not* know!" she answered quickly.

"Then he must be got away from this house, and as soon as possible."

"But if we are watched?"

"We must use strategy."

"How?"

"First, then, another house must be taken, and this time a detached house in an exclusive quarter of the city, or else a very humble tenement in a crowded section, will be best for our purpose. You understand me, your household must be either *more* aristocratic than at present, or much humbler. A change of identity is necessary. Another thing, it must number more people or less."

"I see."

"When the place is chosen all must be done quietly. This place, I believe, was taken furnished?"

"Yes, or nearly so."

"Well, your belongings must be left behind, and this house must be retained for a while. Last, you must go away from here one at a time, and as if you were soon coming back. Your father, of course, must be the first to go, *you* would do well to remain here, at least to be seen here for two or three days after, perhaps even longer; and your servants, they had better be dismissed and others taken."

She was silent for a moment, then, "Has this matter been discussed with the others?"

"With Passauf and Lugos and Savorin, yes."

"Have you spoken to my father?"

"I have already told you, no. I wished to consult *you* first."

"And why?"

He flushed and looked annoyed.

"Oh, you shall understand it," he said with a touch of bitterness, "I know that we must give *some* reason for proposing this change to your father, and felt that it must not be put *too* seriously, for his sake. It was decided that we should represent to *him* that we feared our *meetings* here were suspected by the police, and that we were uneasy on this score, but I don't think you will be surprised to learn that *I*, at least, anticipated opposition from you."

"And why?"

"Simply out of antagonism to myself."

"Ah!"

"Was I not right? I saw at once, here, to-day, that unless we would have you against us, and perhaps even abetting your father in some rash act, you must know the *truth*. I knew, too, that your father will be likely to consult your comfort and pleasure in regard to a change of residence. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"And now that you know the situation, will you aid us?"

"To protect my father? Can you ask?"

He arose and took up his hat.

"I will not trouble you longer," he said, "remember, this change cannot be made too soon." He moved towards the door. "Can I serve you in any way?"

"No." Then, quickly, an odd look crossing her face, "Yes, if you will please send M. Savorin here; tell him I wish to see him, to-night, if possible."

He frowned in spite of himself, but answered promptly,

"I will see him at once, but I must warn you, M. Savorin does not know *why* we are seeking to remove your father from this house."

"Not know? I thought——"

"*He* thinks that our meetings here have been reported to the police. The truth is known only to you, myself, and two others."

"And they? who are they?"

"I am not at liberty to inform you," he said, and bowed himself out.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MOINA ASSERTS HERSELF.

RUFUS CRASHAW was as good as his word, and Rene Savorin appeared in Moina's drawing-room at an early hour. He was restless and preoccupied at first, but he was quick to see that the girl was troubled, and making an effort to appear at ease with him. And with his usual kindness he threw off his own anxieties, and became, for the time, at least, the old Rene, bright, helpful, quick to understand, and to sympathize.

They talked over the projected change, and she found it as Crashaw had said. He was quite unsuspicious of the real reason why this place, which had begun to seem like a home to both of these waifs, must be given up. They talked of her father, too ; and Moina spoke of him to Rene freely, as she did to none other.

"Sometimes," she said, "a terrible fear comes over me. I hardly dare to put it into words ; and yet, I will, I must. I want you to tell me what *you* think—honestly, candidly. You have seen this change in my father, Rene ; you have marked it day after day. He has passed from gentleness to sternness : from a man full of kindly considerateness for all about him, of charitable words and deeds, to a self-absorbed taciturn man. Judging hardly, swift to condemn : forgetful, or caring nothing for anything, any more, except this 'cause,' this '*great work*' of his. Once he was all for mediation, for conciliatory measures, now——" she dropped her head upon her hands and sighed.

"I know," he said, "he has ceased to care for, or think of the individual. Persons are lost sight of ; only the end in view must be considered. It would not be so bad," he added, regretfully, "if those traits in him were not encouraged and strengthened by—the others. There, Moina, don't tempt me into saying too much ; I am still one of them, remember."

"For your own sake I could wish you were not. But there, my poor Rene, I know what holds *you*."

And they sat in gloomy silence for a moment, while before the mental gaze of both arose the image of the beautiful Princess Orloff.

"You began," he said, presently—"you began to speak of something ; a presentiment—a fear. Do you—was it—your father?"

"Oh, I believe you have guessed it, have seen it yourself! Rene, do you think—can it be that my father is gradually, little by little, becoming—insane?"

Rene shook his head.

"I wish I were qualified to answer that," he said.

"But you have thought of it ; yes, I see how you have thought of it. Rene, if *that* should happen. Oh! I could not bear it. And you don't know, even *you*, do not know how *much* I have borne, and am bearing!" And then she broke down utterly. It was the close of a long, trying day, and Rene found the task of consoler difficult. A great fear and dread had seized upon her.

"Promise me this, Rene," she said, when she had grown calmer. "Promise that you will not go away from us when we have left this house. I see how it will be. When the change is made those men will be with us more ; is it not so?"

"I fear so—yes."

"Promise me—that you will be more than ever my friend then, Rene! that you will stand between me and that man Crashaw. He thinks——" she stopped, blushing hotly.

Rene smiled reassuringly.

"He thinks we are lovers," he said, lightly ; "and *let* him think so. It may make it easier for you. He let me know, in his polite way, to-day, that he had arrived at this sage conclusion."

"And has he never guessed——" she began, and stopped again.

"That I have given my heart elsewhere," he finished for her, quietly and sadly. "I think he suspected it at one time ; I am sure he did ; and I am quite sure, too, that Lugos knows. But for some reason Lugos keeps his own counsel, and does not trouble himself to enlighten Crashaw. I don't understand that man ; sometimes I think he is pleased with the knowledge that I am bound to them the more strongly because of *her*."

"And yet he pretends to doubt *her*."

"Ah—do you know that?" Rene looked in surprise, and Moina bit her lip and flushed. Little did even Rene guess of the knowledge, the painful load of secrets weighing down the heart of this little girl, who, by her father's choice and her own acquiescence, was outside the circle, *with*, but not of, them. He noted her embarrassment and did not follow up the subject.

"Her father has told her, of course," he said to himself, and wondered a little. Miles La Croix, as he was at present, was not apt to be communicative, especially upon such a matter. And now the talk turned quite naturally and easily upon Sacha Orloff. It was not the first time Rene had found mournful consolation in talking to Moina of his hopeless love and its object.

"I wish you could know each other," he said, after a time. He had said it more than once, but this time Moina's reply caused him to start.

"I cannot," she said, hopelessly.

"Cannot?"

"I am forbidden."

"Forbidden? You, too?" He started and flushed angrily. "I cannot understand it," he cried ; "who has forbidden *you?*"

"My father."

"And when?—since when?"

"Since Madam Orloff called upon Captain Fernand, and said something, I believe, about wishing to know me. What do you mean, Rene ; you speak as if *she* has been forbidden too."

"Then I may as well complete my treason. She would have been here long ago, but—*she has* been forbidden, too. I *cannot* understand it!"

Suddenly the girl struck her hands sharply together, and drew herself to her fullest height.

"I can!" she exclaimed; "I *do!*"

"What is it. Tell me?"

"They mean to cut me off from all friends, from all outside help. They want to isolate me, to make me utterly at their mercy!"

"They? But whom—whom?"

"Crashaw, Lugos, and perhaps—Heaven knows, it may be so, he is so changed—perhaps—my *father!*"

"Good Heavens! And why?"

"I will tell you now. I must! It is to make me consent to marry that monster, Rufus Crashaw!"

Rene Savorin caught his breath hard, and then for a moment buried his face in his hands. He saw it clearly now. Many things hitherto strange stood out in all their naked ugly simplicity, revealed by those last few words; and his heart was wrung for this poor tormented girl, a victim, even as he was. Yes, he understood now; this was why he had been permitted to singe his wings, and flutter helpless about Sacha Orloff, unchecked and unreproved! *This* was why Rufus Crashaw opposed so strenuously his domestication there during Miles La Croix's illness! *This* was why Crashaw had favoured him with that black look when he gave him Moina's message. He saw it clearly now. Crashaw believed him to have been playing a double game, perhaps believed him to be Moina's lover? Ah; *now* he knew that in Rufus Crashaw he had a bitter, powerful enemy. But he had no thought of deserting Moina; more than ever now would he stand her friend. He lifted his head and met her eyes with a smile in his own.

"And this is why you asked me to stand between you and him?"

She nodded. "Yes; that is why. He was here to-day, you know." And then the story all came out, the story of his proposal and her father's part in it.

"He commanded me to see him," she said, with quivering lip. "Do you think he can be really against me? Once I would have *asked* him instantly; now—I dare not."

"It would do no good," said Rene; "we must wait, and be guided by circumstances."

"That man," she went on, bitterly; "he has plotted against me from the first." And then she told him how, long before, Crashaw had urged her father to break off the growing intimacy between herself and Madeline Payne, and suddenly, at that name, a constraint fell upon them both, and Rene hastened to carry the conversation back to safer ground.

"I suppose you know the plan for your removal?" he asked.

"In part. All has been decided for us, I dare say."

"Subject, I suppose, to your approval, and that of your father. I think they are very good, the plans. You are to keep this house and leave your old servants in it, employing new ones for the new quarters. The house is to appear, as much as possible, as if you were all here as usual: the blinds opened by day, the drawing-room and studio lighted at night."

Moina started. "But, Margot," she said; "I will not leave Margot."

"She can come to you after a little," he said soothingly; "and she will have the other servant with her."

"No, she will not. We keep but two servants here, and the cook goes home every night."

"Then you must get a new woman at once; one who will stay here with Margot."

"Ah," sighed Moina, "if Margot were not so much of a foreigner; if I only had someone, even a servant, who was *not* as much their servant as mine!"

"Stay," cried Rene, his face lighting up; "I have an idea. You can have such a servant, easily, through the Princess, or, if you prefer it, through Miss Payne. I can see one or the other. What do you say?"

Moina was thoughtful for a long moment. Then she lifted her head, a new light of determination shining in her eyes.

"I am going to begin to fight *hard* for my emancipation," she said resolutely. "Luckily, they have not yet begun to choose my servants. I want an honest woman, who will obey *me* and none other; one who is used to hardships, and is neither timid nor nervous. I will write a letter, and you may take it to Miss Payne. Oh!"—her face suddenly clouding, "I *wish* I could be sure I was not plotting against my father. But—if he is planning to deliver me over to Rufus Crashaw, I can never forgive him!"

"For heaven's sake, Moina; for your own sake," said Rene earnestly, "don't lose faith in your father! As God hears me, I believe him to be as much a victim in the hands of the Philistines as yourself!" But when Moina, surprised and startled, attempted to question him, he would say no more.

Early the next day Rene was in consultation with the Princess, and before his outgoing feet had crossed the threshold of the "Oriental;" she, in her turn, was closeted with Madeline Payne. The result of these two interviews is embodied in the following note written and promptly despatched to Roger Drexel, or to his address:—

"MR. HURST,—DEAR SIR,—I have just sent my maid, Minna, to Miss La Croix, who has appealed to me in a somewhat roundabout way for a servant; the request came by M. Rene Savorin to Madam La Princess, and from her to me. I have explained to madam that I intend to take back my old French maid, and that this opportunity for disposing of Minna is quite welcome to me. Minna will be with me at eleven o'clock to-morrow, and will receive instructions, if you have any to give. *She is to be trusted.* "M. P."

CHAPTER LXIX.

SECTION NUMBER FIVE.

IT was not hard to persuade Miles La Croix to consent to a change of residence, especially as he found Moina and Savorin both in favour of the change.

Lugos himself had been at some pains to explain the necessity to Captain Fernand, and that apparently easily-convinced personage graciously accepted the version given him, and declared himself ready to follow the fortunes of his friends the La Croix.

The new place of abode was quickly found. So quickly, indeed, that it would seem to have been made ready to hand; as was in truth the case.

But Crashaw's plans were not the only ones that worked with wondrous smoothness. Rene Savorin brought Minna boldly into the house, and she was at once accepted by Moina. It seemed quite natural to Crashaw that Moina should delegate the task of finding her a servant to Rene. He did not question this.

And now all is ready for the flitting of the household. At early dusk Moina and Minna go forth on foot, and with nothing about them to indicate a permanent departure. They are not to go to the new house that night. Moina's rooms are not yet ready to receive her; but they are to occupy, for the night only, snug rooms at a little hotel not far from the new abode. When they are a few blocks from their door, Rene Savorin joins them, puts them into a cab, and escorts them thither.

"You are sure papa will go to-night?" Moina asks anxiously, when Savorin is about to take leave of them.

"Quite sure; all is arranged."

"And will he get away safely?" Moina is uncommonly nervous and anxious.

"Oh, no doubt of it. You see, it will be managed like this. Soon, say in half-an-hour from now, your father will drive away in a cab, in company with Crashaw. An hour or two later he will return—that is, the same cab will return—and two men will get out; but this time it will be—whom do you think?"

"Oh, I *can't* think!"

"Makofski! He is nearer your father's height than any of the others, and he will wear your father's cap and cloak. The two will enter. Meantime, Margot will have lighted the house, as if for company; and, to make the assumption of the host's presence more complete, Lugos and one or two others will arrive shortly, and remain, probably, until quite a late hour."

Moina has grown suddenly pale. Under her long cloak she is pressing a clenched hand hard against her side.

"And you—Rene—are *you*—to go back?"

"Not I." Rene laughs lightly. "I am quite at your disposal if you will have me——"

"Oh, no, no! Go back, Rene. We shall be quite safe and comfortable; besides——"

"Oh, I shall not go *back*. I do not want to, and I am not wanted. If you dismiss me I shall hover about, not far away, and be at hand to escort you to your new abode in the morning. Those are my *instructions*."

"Your instructions! From whom?"

"From—only think of it—from *Crashaw*."

Still the hand underneath the cloak is clutching at her side; but she steadies her voice and manages to dismiss him with the assurance

that she needs nothing and means to retire early. But when she is shut up with Minna in the two little rooms they are to occupy for the night, she will not remove her cloak, and goes hastening up and down with nervous, unsteady steps, and face studiously turned away from the discreet Minna.

By and by, she speaks over her shoulder:

"Minna, do you know the city well?"

"Somewhat, gracious fraulein."

"Do you know where we are now?"

"Truly, no. I did not notice much, after we entered the cab—but I can find out very easily."

"Oh, *can* you?" eagerly.

"Certainly, gracious fraulein. It is only to ask at the office, that would be quite proper—for *me*."

"Minna," the girl begins, and extends an eager hand toward her new maid, "you may find out—very discreetly—our location—how far we are from B—— Street, and how long it would take to drive there—in—*in the morning*."

* * * * * *

The programme, as outlined by Rene Savorin, is not carried out with exactness. Miles La Croix goes with Crashaw, but he does not come back with him, or his counterfeit presentment does not. Instead, Crashaw returns alone and soon, and is promptly admitted by Margot.

"Margot, my good girl," he begins, affably, "your master has thought better of leaving you alone in this big house to-night. He wishes you to take this card and go to the place at once. You will find a room already engaged for you, and you can pass the night there very comfortably. In the morning you will return here and open the house, and attend to your duties as you have been directed."

Margot looks at the card and her face brightened. Not for worlds would she have murmured when told that she must stay behind in this lonely house, knowing it to be the wish of her master. But she knows the place indicated by that bit of pasteboard, a trim little café only a little way down a side street, kept by a cheery widow. Margot knows her, she has often bought dainty breakfast rolls there, and is aware that there are neat lodgings to let in connection with the café proper.

She thanks M. Crashaw with many smiles, mentally blesses her master for his thoughtfulness, and goes at once, first taking the precaution to lock the pantries, the drawing-room and dining-room, and the doors of her mistress's room, taking the keys with her.

Left alone, Crashaw looks about him and finds something amiss.

"Confound it," he growls, "I forgot to make her light the drawing-rooms." He consults his watch, then adds, after a moment's reflection, "it can't be helped now, perhaps it's better so. At any rate, the way is clear, and I must let them know it." His cab is still in waiting, he enters it and drives away.

Nearly an hour goes by, and then a second carriage comes swiftly to the door. From it one man alights, crosses the pavement, opens the door with a latch key and enters the vestibule. All is still

within, and the dim light reveals the fact that it is Crashaw once more.

Leaving the outer door wide open he crosses the pavement and says just a word with his face at the carriage window. Then he goes back and three others emerge from the vehicle and disappear within the vestibule.

"Come in," says Crashaw from the inner hall, "the drawing-room has been locked by that confounded woman that I sent away; but we can light up the studio here. It will do for us until the others come."

Another half-hour passes, and then the carriage which carried away Miles La Croix and his companion draws up to the door, stopping where the light from across the way gleams upon it and fitfully reveals the two men who alight.

At the sound of the wheels someone opens the door and steps out.

"Is that you, La Croix?" calls Crashaw from the topmost step. "Glad you're back; I've been here for some time."

The two last arrivals go in quickly; it is Crashaw who closes and locks the outer door.

Then the three confront each other in the hall.

Captain Fernand throws off Miles La Croix's cloak and hat, and tosses them down.

"There, gentlemen," he says carelessly, "that little masquerade has passed unchallenged. Let us hope that any spy who may be on the look-out, rests in the faith that he has seen our friend La Croix safely under his own roof. And now," glancing from Crashaw to Lugos, "what is the nature of this—conference of yours, and where is it to be held?" He moves toward the drawing-room, but Crashaw puts out his hand.

"It's locked," he says, "and the housemaid, who has gone out, I believe, probably has the key. The studio is a poor place for such a talk as ours. Is there not an upper room, captain? any place will do, so that its windows are not open to observers."

Captain Fernand turns the handle of the drawing-room door, in spite of Crashaw's words.

"It's odd that the drawing-room should be locked," he says. And then the smooth voice of Lugos interposes.

"There's the study——"

"No," says Captain Fernand with sudden decision. "We will go up to my own chamber. The study, no doubt, is closed also," as indeed it is, and the key thereto safely reposing in the captain's pocket, a trust from Miles La Croix. "I will light the way for you," he adds, and while Crashaw and Lugos at the foot of the stairs, exchange significant glances, he goes lightly up, and they hear, in a moment, the snap of a parlour match, and see a light flash up in the hall above them.

"It's the very place!" whispers Crashaw. "In the middle of the house and——"

"Hush!" murmurs Lugos; "the captain is speaking from the floor above."

"You can come up at once, gentlemen," and then they hear a key turned, a door opened, and again, faintly, the sound of another match.

With a bound like a cat, Crashaw is at the outer door, which he opens quickly.

"Go up," he whispers, "and say that Passauf has just joined us." Then as Lugos ascends the stairs he closes the door with a bang and darts at once into the studio.

"You have just arrived, *remember*," he says to the three men seated within. "Follow me; all is well."

The chamber is lighted when Lugos enters, and the captain is busy closing the blinds and drawing together the long soft curtains. There are two windows opposite the door of entrance, and at one side is a second door, before which hangs a heavy drapery.

"Ah!" says Lugos, looking about him, "you have room enough here." Then he crosses to the window where the captain still stands, draws back the curtain and looks out. "Why, how do you face?" he asks, as if in surprise.

"South, and a dead wall," is the captain's careless answer as he turns back and busies himself in clearing a large writing-table, which stands near the tapestry-hung door, and drawing forward two or three chairs.

"Better and better," says Lugos to himself, and then he comes away from the window; "wasn't that the street door?" he asks.

"Probably," drawing forward a third chair; and, then, through his own open doorway comes, first, Rufus Crashaw, next, Jules Passauf, and last, two burly strangers, who enter somewhat awkwardly and halt at the door, while Lugos comes quickly forward, greets them by names that are strange to Captain Fernand, and expresses his delight that, "at the eleventh hour they have decided to come;" and thus Captain Fernand is made aware that the presence of these two new-comers has been solicited, despaired of, and is, at last, most welcome. After which they are duly presented.

If Captain Fernand is in any way disturbed, surprised, or annoyed, there is nothing to indicate it. He receives the new-comers with utmost coolness, and then turning, draws the table further from the wall and brings forward more chairs.

The two strangers, stalwart, dark-browed men, are not quite at ease sitting at the captain's table.

They have little to say at first, and their eyes are often and stealthily fixed upon the face of Captain Fernand. If they are ill at ease, *he* is not. And if he is aware of their covert scrutiny, he makes no sign.

And now they are all seated about the little table; Lugos, with Crashaw and Passauf on either side, sitting opposite the captain, who, singularly enough, finds himself between the two burly strangers.

There is a momentary silence as all settled themselves in their places, then Captain Fernand says,

"Gentlemen, I have placed my quarters at your disposal, pray consider me as a host no longer, simply as at your service." Dr. Lugos bows gravely, and glancing about him, Captain Fernand sees a look of gloom settle suddenly upon the faces of his five guests.

"Captain Makofski," begins Lugos, "in coming here to-night, and

in what we are about to do—we are acting, not as we would, perhaps, but as we *must*. We are here in obedience to our oath, as embodied in *Section Number Five*."

A sudden change flashes across the countenance of Captain Fernand. He moves suddenly, and then, as the men on either side turn toward him suddenly, he drops back into his former position and bows to the man opposite him, meeting his gaze squarely the while.

"Ah?" the icy upward inflection says more than many syllables.

Dr. Lugos takes from his pocket a slender folded document, and lays it upon the table before Jules Passauf.

"The secretary of our committee will read the charge," he says.

Passauf takes the document, spreads it out before him, and reads it with mechanical correctness.

It is an exceedingly formal document, and the words "whereas," and "inasmuch," and the phrases, "The council decrees" and "By order of the council," are frequent upon the page. It ends as follows :—"And it is the judgment of the council that, because of circumstances and conditions known and understood by all members of the *Inner Circle* and the *Supreme Council*, this investigation shall be carried out privately by the committee chosen, which committee shall consist of five or seven members of the Inner Circle, three of whom shall also belong to the *Supreme Council*, and the result of this same shall be reported at a private and special session of the council aforesaid." All of which reduced to plainest language, means that Captain Fernand Makofski has been denounced by some party or parties unknown, as a traitor to the cause he has so recently espoused, and that he is now to "be tried" by the five men who have taken him by strategy, a prisoner, as he well understands, in his own quarters.

"Captain Makofski," says Lugos, breaking the silence that has followed the reading, "have you anything to say?"

"At this stage, nothing; except that your method, as well as the time and place, is—to say the least—peculiar. I may have more to say—when I have heard your charges."

His voice is slightly scornful. He leans back in his chair and lets his eyes rest first upon one and then another of the group.

"Probably," he adds, as no one is in haste to speak, "you have at least gone through the form of drawing up specific charges."

It is Lugos who answers. Evidently, it is Lugos with whom he has to deal. The eyes of the two men meet and neither falters. Those of Lugos are steely cold, and his voice is unmoved and matter-of-fact.

"The charges are certainly specific," he says, "and they can be presented verbally. If you are able to clear yourself, so much the better. We shall all have cause to congratulate ourselves."

Makofski merely nods his head.

"Why don't you put your question," growls Rufus Crashaw, without looking up from the table, where his eyes for the most part have rested.

"I was about to do so. Captain Makofski, and gentlemen of the the committee. attend, please." He leans forward and fixes his eyes

upon the face of the accused. "Captain Makofski, you are accused of thwarting the plans of the council; of giving information to the enemy; of coming among us for that purpose."

All eyes were turned to him now. But his answer seems slightly disappointing, to judge from the look upon four of the faces.

"Of course, you are prepared to prove this."

"Then you do not deny it?"

"I do not choose to waste words now. Proceed. Upon what do you base these assertions?" He has not once changed his position, his attitude is as easy, as careless, as at first; but his eyes meet and hold those of his chief accuser, who draws back slightly, as if to brace himself anew for the struggle that is about to begin.

"I will not enter into details," begins Lugos, "unless it is by your desire. The chief accusation is this—that you, for purposes which we will not enter into, have introduced yourself into the household of Miles La Croix, and ingratiated yourself with him, winning his confidence until, in some manner, by some strong and undue influence, you have drawn from him secrets of the organization, which should never have gone beyond the hands of the executive—the council. That he has made you his confidant—and so put our society and all its interests in jeopardy, we——"

"Stop." Makofski's voice is lifted, and is taking on a sterner tone.

"Then it is not I alone who am accused?"

"There is no other——"

"No other! Do you think me so ignorant of your methods—your rules? You speak of Miles La Croix, as having betrayed his trust——"

"No. Only of having placed too much confidence in you."

"And when is *he* to be tried by a private commission of the Supreme Council?"

"For what?"

"For confiding too much in myself. Is not that your charge?"

"So you admit this confidence?"

"I admit nothing. I answer nothing yet. Answer me. Has Miles La Croix been accused?"

"Miles La Croix is our chief."

"Perhaps you wish me to infer that this outrage is authorized by him."

"There are certain things," said Lugos, slowly, "which Miles La Croix puts quite out of his own hands. These investigations, for instance."

A moment Makofski looks in his eyes in silence, fairly holding his glance, while a strange slow smile curls his lips, then—

"You are an able man, Dr. Lugos," he says, quietly. "If only you had supporters like yourself," and he casts a glance of open contempt upon the men on either side. "Permit me one more question. Does Miles La Croix *know* that I am here, entrapped in his house, and on trial to-night?"

One of the strangers start suddenly. "What's that!" he asks.

"What do you mean?" demands M. Lugos.

"That sound—I heard something."

Lugos glances swiftly across at Captain Fernand, but the latte sits unmoved and indifferent. Then he turns to Crashaw.

"Are you sure there is no one here?" he asks sharply.

"No one except ourselves," replies Crashaw, impatiently. "What you heard was a noise in the street."

"It didn't sound so," avers the man, who had heard the sound. "Didn't you hear it," turning to Passauf; but Passauf shakes his head. He never wastes words.

Lugos turns in his place and looks about the room.

"What rooms are on this floor?" he asks abruptly.

Crashaw is silent, it is Makofski who replies.

"Only the sleeping rooms, I believe, and the little study at the back."

"What is behind that curtain?" nodding toward the door directly behind Makofski.

"That? There is a door there," the latter says easily. "It opened into La Croix's chamber, but Miss La Croix caused it to be closed when I took possession here, on the ground that her father was a restless person, and likely to disturb my repose. I think you will be obliged to go outside if you wish to enter there."

"It's of no use," says Crashaw again, "there is no one in the house but ourselves; besides, the rooms are locked. I heard the order given to lock them, and the servant has carried away the keys."

Lugos turns back to the table. *He* has heard no sound, and it does not suit him that any one of their number should leave this room as yet.

"Your assurance is quite sufficient," he says, and turns back to Makofski, resuming as if there had been no break in their dialogue.

"Do you admit that you have, by your powers of persuasion or in some other manner, obtained from Mr. La Croix information concerning the movements of the circle?"

"This is repetition. Is your chief of the council upon trial, too, I ask again?"

"That cannot concern you now. It is to your interest to exonerate *yourself*, if you can."

"From what charge, then? We are dealing in meaningless phrases."

"I will put more meaning into mine," says Lugos, icily.

"Then I may respond in kind," retorts his *vis-à-vis*.

"Since you have been under this roof," begins Dr. Lugos slowly, "three separate pieces of work, all planned here and fully known to Miles La Croix, and *to no one else* under this roof, have been brought to naught. It is impossible that anyone *outside* this house could have betrayed them as they have been betrayed, because certain details were only known to the chief council, and to two others, who are *beyond suspicion*."

"And who, no doubt, I see before me," bowing ironically to Lugos and then to Crashaw. "Since you are fully convinced that I am

already familiar with these 'pieces of work,' you, of course, cannot hesitate about going into details."

"I will refresh your memory; it is quite safe to do so," with a significant glance around the table. "Nearly six weeks ago the mills of a certain man across the river, and a few miles from the city, were to have been exploded. The plan was perfect—all was arranged. The night was set. The owner of those mills is one of our strongest enemies. The explosion would have crippled, have disarmed, him."

"Really—and it failed?" in a tone of polite interest.

"And it failed. The men who went to do the work found every avenue guarded; the buildings, all the enclosures, were surrounded with watchers. The next morning this brief notice appeared in the newspapers." He leans across the table and pushes a small newspaper clipping towards Makofski, who takes it up and peruses it with much apparent interest.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.—The owner of the Golden Fleece Mills would inform the persons who last night made an attempt upon his property that they are *marked men.* 'Let us alone' is our motto. Hands off, gentlemen, *nothing else will save you.*"

That is what he reads, and he returns it to Lugos across the table with an actual smile upon his lips.

"Very interesting," he says; "is there anything more?"

If he is seeking to arouse the anger of his icy-faced opponent he is not successful. The man takes up the slip, replaces it in a small pocket-book, and resumes.

"This was the *first.* Warned by this we put the active working of our next case into other hands, and only the *fact* that it was to be done was known, as it must have been, to our chief. It was desirable that we incite a strike among the employés of a large corporation, and before this could be done a foreman, a man in authority, and who was *too popular*, must be removed."

"Ah!"

"I see you are interested. This man, I say, was to have been removed, and another, one of our own men, would step into his place by promotion."

"I see."

"But, in spite of our precaution, and just as the train was laid, the man who was to be got rid of, was sent safely out of our *reach*, and *our* candidate was turned out with a warning, which made it evident, to us, that our plot had been betrayed."

"How exceedingly strange," comments Makofski, as if pondering an interesting case.

"But that is not all. Less than two weeks ago it was decided that a heavy blow must be dealt the enemy—that they must be taught that men could not with impunity hold offices in leagues formed for our suppression. It was determined that two men of high position and great wealth must be so dealt with, that they could work us no ill. Through *them* all the other men organizing against us, and pouring out their wealth for our confusion, were to have been warned and intimidated."

"A double removal you mean. We are not squeamish here, M. Lugos—well?"

"Well, as you know, *this* scheme failed; those two men were warned. It was impossible to reach them." He paused again, and put away the pocket-book, which has remained in his hand, with the air of a man who has made an end of something.

Fernand Makofski draws closer to the table; his face has suddenly grown very grave and stern.

"Is that all?" he asks.

"Is it not enough?"

"Answer me!—have you other charges to bring?"

"Only that which naturally follows this one, that of being a spy in the camp, a traitor to our cause."

Instantly Makofski throws back his head and draws himself erect.

"*Now*," he says, "let us understand each other. Let us waste no more words. You have chosen to accuse me, to try me without a hearing. I know you and your order well enough to know what that means. *Already* you have condemned me. Stop!" as there arose a movement, as if in dissent, about the table. "You would never talk thus freely to a man whom you expected to see go out from this place alive and free. What mode of execution have you chosen?" He is leaning towards Lugos and across the table as he speaks, and his eyes have suddenly become very alert. The two men on either side have drawn back a little, and are intently watching his face.

"You mistake," says Lugos, still coldly calm; "we offer you terms."

"Terms! *You!*"

"Yes. What we ask is, that you leave this country, and at once. You will be safe enough in France. If you will promise to remain here until morning, under guard, of course, and as a prisoner, and to leave by the next steamer, seeing no one meanwhile but your guards, we ask no more."

"And my guards, who are they to be?"

Lugos turns his gaze toward the two strangers.

"I thought so." He makes a sudden backward motion, pushes back his chair, and stands erect before them. Afterwards, as they think of it, it seems to them that his two hands have been all the time visible upon or near the table; but as he draws himself erect, they see a revolver gleaming in each, and those nearest him note that a tiny drawer in the table is half-open. One of the weapons is aimed at Lugos with the swiftness of lightning, or so it seems to them.

"If one of you move I will shoot down your leader!" he says, grimly. "You have had your little half-hour, *I* am going to have mine. You are going to execute judgment upon me, perhaps; but I have something to say first. If you meditate any harm to that old man who is made your blind tool in so many things, you will live to rue it. For myself I *scorn* to deny your charges; but for that old man I declare, *I swear* to you, that no hint of these plots of yours has ever passed his lips. Nothing—*nothing!* He is only too loyal to the cause he has idealized in that poor half-turned brain of his. Wreck though he is, Miles La Croix is still a *man*, and loyal to the core. As for me, don't fancy that I am in any way your dupe. Do you think I

do not know that from this moment, although I may go out from here free, I am a doomed man? I have seen the vengeance of the council reach across oceans and continents. I know that to you at this moment, unless I can clear myself of these charges, I am *already dead.* Unless I can bring before you the one who *has* betrayed your foul secrets, if they *have* been betrayed, an assassin lurks for me at every corner."

With the glistening weapon still pointing at his head, Lugos rises and faces the man at bay.

"Can you bring forward the betrayer, then?"

No answer.

"He must be self-confessed, mind. Are you able to *prove* that another, and not yourself, has denounced us in these three instances? *Can you?*"

Still no reply; only scorn in eye and on lip.

"*Will you?*"

"NO!"

"*But I can!*" A voice rings suddenly behind him. "*And I* WILL!"

CHAPTER LXX.

VINDICATED.

THE curtains behind them are swept suddenly aside, and there, in the open doorway, the darkness of the room behind her making a weird background for her pale, strained, beautiful face, stands Moina La Croix.

"*I* can tell!" she says again, and sweeps forward and stands at Makofski's side.

Even then, startled and pale though he is now, Fernand Makofski keeps his hold upon his weapons—keeps his aim sure. They are all upon their feet now, but she does not heed them; her eyes are fixed upon *him.*

"It was *I* who betrayed you," she cries. "I, Moina La Croix. This man is innocent of all. It was I who did it."

"Miss La Croix! — Moina! for God's sake — cease!" cries Makofski.

"Don't stop me. There must be no more room for doubt; I must make it all clear. My father is not to blame. He never *meant* to betray the secrets of your wicked council. But he talks in his sleep, and I sat by his bedside night after night and *listened.* And, by and by, I found that he would answer me, and when he began to talk upon a certain subject, I led him on; and he never knew——"

"Moina—oh, hush! Do you not see——"

"You must not stop me. I must tell it all quickly. I *wrote* to these men whom you meant to injure or destroy. I wrote in such a way that they *must* believe me. Don't you understand me? This man is loyal to your murderous order. I wish he were not!"

In some emergencies thought takes the place of words. While Passauf and the two strangers stand aghast, Crashaw and Lugos have

each leaped to a conclusion. That of Crashaw is for Moina, or, rather, for himself, as she represents his interests. "She must be saved from the consequences of her own folly;" that is what he assures himself. And, in the same instant, Lugos is thinking, "We have made an enemy; this blunder must be repaired" Then the two men turn suddenly, and exchange a few swiftly whispered words.

But Moina has not yet spoken her last word. She sees the two strangers range themselves near the door opening upon the hall, and then, as Lugos and Crashaw confer together, she sees Passauf make a stealthy movement toward the door behind her, by which she has entered. Instantly she springs back, and standing in the open doorway, puts out her hand and brings into view the tassel of an old-fashioned bell-cord.

"Stop where you are!" she cries, "or I will call the police." Then, as Crashaw utters a sharp exclamation, and even Lugos starts, she adds, "Do you think that I came here *alone?* There is someone downstairs. I have only to ring to bring the police into the house. Rufus Crashaw, take these men away. Promise me that Captain Makofski goes free and unharmed, and I swear that you shall find *me* with my father——"

"Miss La Croix," says Lugos, coming suddenly forward, "answer me one or two questions."

"Ask them."

"When you sent those letters of warning, did you sign your own name?"

"No."

"Did you give the names of anyone—any of the council or the circles?"

"Do you think I wished to condemn *my father?* How could I denounce you, who have been his associates, without betraying *him?* Be at ease on that score. My sole wish was to save innocent lives, to prevent murder. The name of the order is safe." She turns once more toward Rufus Crashaw. "I mean what I am saying, Rufus Crashaw," she says firmly. "I know I am at your mercy now, because of my father. I have thwarted you thus far, but I did not dream how nearly fatal to another my work would prove."

All this time Makofski has stood with his weapons still in his hands. Now he drops one of them into a side pocket, and brings therefrom, in its stead, a tiny whistle.

"Gentlemen," he says, "allow me to second Miss La Croix's request, that you leave the house at once. Also let me inform you *now* that I was not quite unprepared for your attack." He lifts the silver whistle to his lips. "At another time I shall be quite ready to resume this interrupted conversation. *Now* allow me to suggest that this house is still my abiding-place. Miss La Croix is still mistress here." He turns suddenly toward Moina, who yet retains her hold upon the bell-cord. "Miss La Croix, is your maid within call?"

"Yes," in a low tone.

He glances at her face, and then he moves so that his broad shoulders form a screen between her and the others. Again it is

Lugos who speaks, signs, and glances have been rapidly exchanged, and the two burly strangers have already moved toward the door.

"Captain Fernand, you are a man of the world; I address you as such. Miss La Croix's confession has altogether exonerated you; and on our part, all is as if the events of the past hour had never occurred. You stand again as if this accusation had never been brought against you. It would not become me, as an agent of the council, to say more. At another time, and as an individual, I shall hope to express myself more fully, and in a better manner." He pauses, and Makofski bows silently. "As for Miss La Croix," he goes on, "we are willing to accept her parole upon condition that she goes directly from this place to her new home under such escort as we shall appoint; that she shall not mention this night's events to her father; and that she sees no one, and communicates with no one, until we shall have conferred with her again, which we will do to-morrow. We will then tell her our decision as regards herself and father."

Moina answers without leaving her place in the shadow of the doorway—

"I shall remain here to-night. To-morrow morning I will come. I agree to all the rest."

"And I," says Makofski, "with Miss La Croix's consent, will be the one to see her safely from this place to her new home and her father's protection." He looks intently at Lugos, and the latter rightly interpreting the glance, thinks it best to agree, in spite of Crashaw's frown.

There is little more to be said. The burly strangers are the first to go out and down the stairs, the others following; and Captain Makofski brings up the rear. At the foot of the stairs stands Minna, a look of anxiety upon her face. The street door is ajar.

"Go up to your mistress," says Makofski, as he passes.

When Minna enters Miles La Croix's dark chamber, she finds Moina lying across the threshold between the two rooms, in a dead faint.

* * * * * *

"How is she? Has she recovered?" It is half-an-hour since Minna lifted her new mistress in her strong young arms, and laid her tenderly upon her father's bed. It is Captain Fernand, pacing up and down in the next room, who asks the question of Minna, entering through the connecting doorway.

"Better, sir, but——"

"Then tell her I must speak with her. It is necessary."

Ten minutes later they are face to face in Miles La Croix's studio where the discreet Minna has turned on the light and drawn the curtains.

Moina is very pale still, and a strange tremulousness has overtaken her physical self. Her hand trembles and her voice is unsteady; but she betrays no other sign of emotion, as he enters and stands before her, begging her not to rise, and asking, in the same breath, if she feels strong enough to tell him how she happened to be there, in that house, at such a time.

What she tells him may not be quite coherent, and is certainly a little deficient as to motive; but it seems to satisfy him, and his eye kindles from time to time as if he heard a something between the words.

She had not been taken to her father as she had expected, and she had not been pleased with the place selected for her night's sojourn. Minna, her new maid, had proved very efficient; and so, when she had learned that poor, faithful Margot was to remain behind in the abandoned house, and Minna had declared herself able to find a way back for both of them, she had resolved to come.

"I had my own latch-key," she concluded. "I always kept one, and had not thought to leave it. We entered with that, expecting to find Margot, but she was gone; and my own rooms and the drawing-room, all were locked; so was the little study. Through some oversight, papa's room had been left open; and while we stood in the doorway, debating what we should do, we heard the street door, and Rufus Crashaw's voice below; we heard a few words, and then——"

She blushes rosily, and her face drops as he leans toward her.

"You heard some words—tell me—tell me truly—did you *know* the plot that was hatched against me?" He is standing close beside her now, and she does not try to meet his gaze; but, almost against her own will, she finds herself saying brokenly,

"I—I feared—something, and when I heard those men below, I—I dared not go away—or make myself known."

There is a low hassock close beside her, and quietly seating himself, he suddenly takes her hand.

"Say, rather, that you bravely dared to stay. Moina, do you know that you have saved me from d ath this night. Yes, *from death.* I had no suspicion of this plot, this attack. I knew that your father was safe for the present, that you, under the care of Rene Savorin, was safe also. And I was prepared to spend this night here alone, and in perfect tranquillity. Their inquiry was but a mockery; they had sent your servant away, and they never meant that I should go from this house alive. The two burly ruffians were, no doubt, the men who were to have made an end of me; but for you I should be at this moment lying dead up yonder, or fighting for my life against desperate odds."

She is weak and trembling still from the excitement of the past hour. She is a woman, and reaction must come. She has no more strength with which to meet the situation, with the picture of his recent danger thus vividly before her she turns paler still and utters a low cry.

"Oh!" she says wildly. "*Have* you escaped? Are you quite safe—even yet——?"

"I think so; I hope so—for the present, certainly. But," leaning closer and still holding her hand, "Moina—Moina, in an hour like this, be frank with me, tell me—for if it be true, this life which you have saved will be of far more value for the knowledge; did you come here to-night—and brave those would-be butchers, for my sake—to save *me*?"

No answer. Hands trembling in his, head drooped lower and lower ; cheeks from pale to red again. He bends closer—bowing his head, and gently raising hers, their eyes meet for just a moment, then—her face is hidden upon his breast, his arms are clasping her close.

"Moina," he whispers above the bowed head ; "Moina—beloved —mine!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE LAST ASSAULT.

In spite of the events of the foregoing chapter, things moved, to all outward appearance, very much as if they had never happened during the week which followed them.

Moina went to her new place of abode next morning, and, after an interview with M. Lugos—Crashaw she declined to confer with—assumed her place in the new household, very much as before in the old. Lugos had exacted her promise not to go away from this new house, except it be with her father, himself, Crashaw, or Rene Savorin in attendance ; not to write to, or in any way hold communication with, anyone outside this circle ; not to touch the books in her father's possession, or in any manner attempt to inform herself further concerning the doings of the "group"; and, having received such promise, M. Lugos was satisfied. He knew Moina La Croix well enough to know that, having given a promise, no matter how reluctantly, she would keep it in the letter and the spirit.

In return for all this, Lugos engaged that her father should remain in ignorance of all that had passed, and that Captain Fernand should be exonerated and reinstated; held innocent, and so declared.

Thus far all went smoothly between them. But when M. Lugos asked if there was any other thing that she could ask, and he was able to grant, she arose and stood before him very erect and pale.

"No, M. Lugos ; nothing!" she said. "For I know how useless it would be for me to intercede for such other victims as are on your black books, and whom I may not warn. And let me tell you this, here and now. If it were not for my father, I would proclaim all that I know from the very housetops. That which I have promised I will do. But I warn you—such influence as I *have* I shall use to prevail upon my father to go back to France. *Here* he is your tool, your dupe —and some day, unless he is rescued, he may be called upon to expiate *your* misdeeds. He is no longer the man who came here from across the water ; and *I* am no longer his first consideration ; but there is a God who hears prayers, and if I did not still believe in *Him*, and hope and trust that a Power far above *yours* would yet stay your hand, I should be hopeless indeed!"

M. Lugos was not a superstitious man, neither was he a believer in

that "Power above" upon which poor, baffled, half-despairing Moina based her last hope. The first half of her speech he felt himself quite capable of dealing with. But even he, sceptic and evil though he was, could not bring himself, in that fair girl's presence, to fling his defiance against the Power she was invoking for his discomfiture. He left her presence, as he entered it, collected, serious, unruffled; but then, and afterwards, her words lingered in his memory,—"A Power above may stay your hand."

Moina was safe for the present, so far as he was concerned. He had no wish to see Miles La Croix's mental instability increased by any untoward accident, any excitement which could be warded off. In fact, La Croix, just as he then was, was precisely the man for his purpose—the very tool he would have chosen, had the choice been his—made to his hand. He only hoped that nothing would occur to change him. And his only fear was that Moina's despondency might arouse some suspicion in her father's mind, and so awaken some new train of thought in a brain that seemed no longer capable of dealing with more than one idea.

This was the weapon which he used to restrain Crashaw, who saw in this new state of things a possible advantage for himself, and to win him over to milder measures.

"It won't do, I tell you," he said in his clear, cool, deliberate way. "The girl is quiet now, resigned, in fact, more so than I at first dared to hope. These women indulge in such strange fantastic doctrines, she means to try and win La Croix over, and get him out of the country; and so far as *I* am concerned it might be a good thing, *after* certain events are well over, when the day of his usefulness is done; but, of course, I understand that it won't suit *you*."

"No!" cried Crashaw with an oath, "it won't."

"So I'll say no more about that. *Your* time will soon come, trust me. But if you push that girl further *now*, she will throw everything to the winds, and I tell that it would be very dangerous; that old man could be easily wrought upon in his present mental condition, and a complete metamorphosis brought about. It's one of the idiosyncrasies of the disease, and the thing that works that change will then be his dominating thought. You must wait, Crashaw; every day is bringing her more and more into our power."

"I don't know about that; what you say of the old man may be true enough, but as to her 'fantastic doctrine,' as you call it, I think I can name that."

"Explain."

"Bah! If you will keep Savorin away from her, I'll take the risk of the *doctrines!*"

"Man, you know we *can't* put Savorin away just at present, he's too useful. But are you sure? I thought——"

"You thought it was the Princess; so did I at first. It's my belief *now*, that *that* was all for a blind. You say for the *present?*"

"Look here, Crashaw, this young man is *your protégé*, not mine. If he promises to be in your way, however, remember that the time is coming when we can easily rid ourselves of some of our encumbrances."

"Ah!" the two men exchanged long sinister glances, then—

"Are you going to leave our captain until that time?" asked Crashaw.

"No," came the prompt answer, "*he* is too dangerous, I shall not feel safe until he is out of our way."

And so it was, that for the week that followed, Rene Savorin was often with the La Croix, and Captain Fernand sometimes. On one or two occasions there even came a few rare moments when Captain Fernand and Moina found themselves alone together.

"Tell me," he said to her at one of these times, "if I should chance to go away for a little while could I trust Savorin to bring a message to you? would you wish it?"

"Yes, oh yes," she said quickly. "You may trust *him!* He admires and likes *you*, and I am a little in his confidence."

And so it came about that one day when Rene was with him in the house on B—— Street, he approached the subject in a manly and straightforward way, and told of his regard for Moina La Croix. He admitted that at present there were reasons why he could not claim her openly, and begged that Rene, in case of need and in his absence, would stand her friend.

"Of course," said Rene, having given the required promise, "you know of Crashaw's pretensions?"

"Yes, and that is one reason why I speak thus to you. I may have to be absent from the city soon, and, in the meantime, if all were known, she might be much annoyed, you understand?"

Savorin nodded and closed the lips, half opened to tell him that he need have no fear, since Rufus Crashaw was looking elsewhere for his rival.

"I will not speak of it," he said to himself, "he may not understand my motive." And so by this act of delicacy, Captain Makofski was left in ignorance of the fact that Rene Savorin was looked upon by Rufus Crashaw as his successful rival.

Ah, Rene Savorin, that kindly meant reticence is yet to cost you dear, yes, dear indeed!

Margot returned to the house in B—— Street, on the morning after the adventure therein, and Makofski continued to occupy his room there, Margot serving his meals and performing the duties of the small ménage with the help of a half-grown girl. The weather was still mild and the evenings pleasant, and while Makofski remained much at home, and seemed to be occupied with writing by day, every evening found him strolling and smoking for an hour or more, in the little oblong park near the house. The place had been an occasional resort for himself and La Croix, and now that he was left alone he seemed to find it more attractive than ever.

It was here that Lugos found him one evening, several days after the "investigation" that had been so nearly fatal to Captain Fernand and his plans. The astute doctor had come in person to assure him that all had been "quietly explained and settled," to proffer the olive branch and beg him to make one of their circle "as of old." He had called first at the house, he said, and had been directed thither by Margot, who had added,

"He told me to send anyone there who asked for him."

Makofski had received him affably, and the two, having disposed of the "business" which brought them together, were pacing up and down under the trees smoking in amiable concert.

'Do you often come here?" asked Lugos. "It seems a quiet place to smoke and think."

"Every night, now that I am alone; I like it, these open-air smokes used to be a part of my nightly routine for years. I fancy I shall resume the practice, or rather keep it up," was Captain Fernand's reply.

"Is it not just a bit lonely?"

"Well, it's not much frequented, if you mean *that*, and it's not too well lighted, but it suits *me*."

It must indeed have suited him, for evening after evening found him there, and when, in the second week of his solitary occupation of the house in B—— Street, the moon waned and then vanished utterly, leaving the little park very gloomy indeed, he still paced and smoked therein, going it seemed earlier, and staying *certainly* later, night after night.

And so the second week approaches its end and Friday night comes. There is a light wind abroad, the air is moist even at sunset, and at dusk there is a soft haze enveloping everything, making all seem indistinct, as if seen through a filmy veil of grey.

"It is going to rain," said Margot to herself, standing at the street door and peering up and down through the haze. And then, as she hears a sound above stairs, "My word, the captain has not gone out *yet*, and it's half an hour later than usual." But even as she says the words, half aloud, his door is heard to close and he comes down the stairs, a large travelling bag in his hand.

"Ah!" she cries seeing this. "Ah, captain, what is that?"

"Is it too large, Margot? it's for the laundryman's boy, he will come for it soon I think." He steps outside and looks up and down in his turn, whistling a few bars of a light Russian air, and Margot draws back.

"Here you are," he says in a moment, breaking off in the middle of a long note, as a boy appears at the foot of the steps.

"And here is the boy." He hands it down to the boy, and turns again to Margot. "I may be out late to-night," he says; "you need not wait for me, I shall want nothing." He goes down the steps, the boy with the valise moving on a few paces ahead, and Margot closes and locks the door.

"Ah, me!" she sighs. "That Captain Fernand; *he* is the good, the kind master to serve; but for him could I ever endure this dreary place? And not to see my dear Miss Moina!" and Margot goes back to her kitchen, little thinking that she has looked upon her Captain Fernand for the last time.

At half-past eight the little oblong park is very quiet; its walks are solitary, its rustic seats unoccupied, when Captain Fernand enters through the pretty arched and shaded gateway, pausing just within, and directly under a lamp, to light a fresh cigar. As he casts away his half-burned match and takes a first pull at the weed he glances carelessly about him. Two men just outside, and seemingly half-in

clined to enter, draw back and make a feint of passing on, and down the street. Evidently their promenade is an aimless one, for they turn at the nearest corner and stroll back, halting at the gate again, then passing and pacing in the opposite direction, only to return as before to the entrance gate. And this time they do not pass, but fall back a little, and then, facing each other, and quite in the shadow, they seem to carry on a light conversation, like two friends who have paused in passing to exchange greetings.

Many moments go by while they stand thus; a policeman passes, glances at them carelessly, and, when he is a few paces beyond them, turns and looks back, then he crosses the street, and, out of sight of the two at the gate, confers a moment with a brother officer.

"They're on hand," he says, "ready to be nabbed."

"Well," declares number two, "*we're* ready to nab them; only it's too soon. Let's get nearer, though," and they cross the street, and, like the two at the gate, feign great interest in each other.

And now, walking slowly, and not too close together, two others approach the little park. The two officers have become more in earnest now. They do not seem to so much as see the large man with shabby garments, nervous gait, and half-averted face; nor his companion, who is like him in dress, but smaller, and who swaggers as he passes, and favours them with a bold stare.

As these two latest comers approach the gate, they slacken their pace, draw nearer each other, and cease their conversation; they seem quite oblivious of the two men standing in the shadow of the trees, but quite near; and they pause at the gate a moment, while one of them, the smaller one, seems to consult a shabby timepiece, by the light underneath which, not long ago, Captain Fernand paused in his promenade to light a cigar. Standing thus, they can hardly help but hear one of the two men just beyond them say, in a voice slightly elevated, "All right, Charlie, I'll be there." The next moment they have passed through the gate, and are quickly lost from sight among the shadows.

As they go, one of the officers says to the other, "Hear *that?* That's the signal! Come, let's make our round up."

Five minutes pass, and all is still in and around the little park. Within, a spark of light seems advancing towards the entrance. The two men, still conversing without, draw closer to the low paling. The fiery spark comes nearer, quite to the entrance, and there it stops, and the smoker stands pulling hard at his cigar, and making it glow still brighter through the gloom and the thickening mist.

Is he going to leave *now?* The men without almost hold their breath. But, no! he turns, he is going back again.

"Come," whispers one of the watchers, "now is our time." They move out from the shadow now, and stand waiting for the smoker to put a few more paces between them.

There is a sound behind them. "Come," whispers the leader; but, even as he speaks, he has the sensation of something springing upon him from the rear, and feels a strong grasp upon his shoulder; something cold touches the back of his neck, something that makes him shudder.

"Not a word," says a low voice; "not a sound. Move on and be quick about it."

They are in the grasp of two policemen, and two others are hurrying to them from across the way. It is too late to run; remonstrances are of no avail.

"Move on and hold your tongues," says the officer in command; "you are going to the station, and the more row you make the worse your case is going to look. You haven't appeared to be in much of a hurry for the past half-hour or more, and you can enjoy each other's society just as well at the station as in that dark little park. It's late in the season for *parks*, anyhow; they ain't safe any more." Which innocent bit of pleasantry had the effect of closing the mouths of the prisoners, and casting them into a state of gloom which lasts until they have reached the station, and for some time after.

While this is passing, Captain Fernand Makofski, still keeping his cigar fiercely aglow, paces alone under the trees and through the shrubbery, which grows dense in places. It is, at all times, a quiet vicinity, and the little park is dimly lighted, while the increasing haze and the wind still rising make it seem a cheerless place for an evening promenade, and sufficiently explains its tenantless condition. Even those who have occasion to cross it, and thus make the distance from street to street a trifle less, go hurrying through; and of these pedestrians there are none at present.

Captain Fernand has been in this cheerless place, pacing and smoking, a full hour now, and he is in the very middle of the grounds, when suddenly, he stops short, stretches out his arm, yawns audibly, and then deliberately seats himself upon a rustic bench, with one arm thrown across the back and his cigar in his fingers. It grows dim, and dimmer, while he seems lost in meditation; then it goes out altogether, and he seems to be thus recalled to himself, and to come out from his reverie. "Pshaw!" he muttered, quite audibly; and then, one might fancy, if one were listening near, that he was trying to light a fresh cigar.

Ah! and there *are* listeners; for, as if the sound were a signal, something springs upon him from the bushes in front, something grasps at him from the rear.

Is he taken by surprise? It would seem so, for he makes no outcry, almost no resistance; he utters a sound surely loud enough to be heard ten paces away, something between a gasp and a hiss, and he wrenches himself free from the detaining hands behind him, and throws himself forward, downward upon one knee. Then half-a-dozen forms seem to have sprung out of the darkness, and there is a struggle going on, fierce, but short, and amazingly silent.

When it is over there is no dark form lying prone upon the pathway, to be stumbled over by the first passer-by, or found at dawn by the park patrolman.

Instead, two figures, handcuffed and drooping, are led from the scene of the struggle by a double brace of policemen, and Captain Fernand Makofski is marching at their head.

* * * * * *

Early in the morning a bit of comedy is enacted at the station, where the two loiterers near the gate of the little park have reluctantly passed the night.

Rudely aroused, and but half awake, they are hurried into the captain's office, and there confronted by a little man, who approaches them, eyes them from head to foot, walks about them, and, after indulging in sundry pleasantries at their expense, turns to the officer in charge.

"This is a fine brace of birds to bring before *me*," he says, loftily; "who are they? Anyhow, they're not the men *I'm* after. Turn 'em loose."

"Case of mistaken identity," says their captor, indifferently; and soon, in the grey of the morning, cold, hungry, and enraged, they find themselves free men once more.

CHAPTER LXXII.

A SURRENDER.

CAPTAIN MAKOFSKI, and afterward the two assailants, who were now the captives, had entered the park at the west side, at the B—— Street entrance. But it was toward the east gate that the capturing party now led their prisoners.

They were a silent party. Evidently they had no desire to attract attention, to draw a crowd about themselves and the two prisoners.

"You don't want to make a scene," said the man who seemed to be the leader; for Makofski, while he went on ahead of the party maintained, from the moment of capture to the arrival at their destination, an unbroken silence. "The quieter you keep the easier we can make it for you, so don't make no scene."

Outnumbered as they were, and with handcuffs on their wrists, the prisoners saw clearly the advisability of silence, the hopelessness of a struggle.

The taller one of the two men had made a fierce resistance, but, once overcome and fettered, he walked heavily between his captors, his chin sunk upon his breast, hopeless or sullen, it would have been difficult in the darkness to tell which.

At the eastern gate two carriages were drawn up close to the curb and well in the shadow. Before these the party halted, and the leader addressed Makofski in a half-whisper,

"How shall we go?"

"Take your man, three of you, and follow my carriage. You know where to go." In another moment the prisoners were separated, and the two carriages were driving rapidly up-town.

When the last carriage came to a halt and the three officers alighted with their prisoner, the first vehicle was just turning away, and its occupants were not to be seen. The prisoner noted this, and then, as he lifted his eyes to where a light streamed out across the pavement, and saw, not the police-station, not a prison, but the doorway and broad steps of a stately mansion, he recoiled with a wild,

hoarse cry, and made a frantic effort to throw off his guards and rush away from the place; but they were too strong for him, and he found himself being forced up the marble steps, in spite of himself, over the threshold and into the wide hall. Then, as the door closed behind them, he cast a wild glance about him. Captain Fernand, his fellow-prisoner, and the two officers, all had disappeared.

Suddenly the man began to tremble violently, and the leader of the three officers pushed him toward a high-backed antique chair.

"Sit down," he said, not unkindly. "You're nervous, man."

The prisoner dropped into the chair. "In God's name," he cried, "*why* have you brought me to this place?"

"Don't be impatient," said the officer. "You'll soon know."

Meanwhile, upon the floor above, two more officers stood at ease in a spacious corridor, conversing in low tones; while, within a room, the door of which they seem to guard, two men were talking earnestly. One of them was making certain strange changes in his costume and general appearance, by removing a false beard and wig, and washing off some stains and pigments, as he conversed.

"I don't think it would do at all, Ken," he was saying. "If I know anything about human nature, it will only add to his obstinacy—and you say he *is* obstinate—and make my work more difficult if you undeceive him now. The time may come when it can be done, and you can then do him as many good turns as you will, or as he needs. For the present, let him think of you as a prisoner like himself, or as having deserted him at the last moment. You can help *me* best in that way. And—the crisis has come, Ken—I am playing my last cards."

"Well," sighed the other, "I must do as you say. I can't doubt the wisdom of your plans. But—I hate to be turned adrift *now*. Can't you give me something to do? Have I become quite useless?"

"Nonsense! Ken, old man; you've been more useful than you know. But you've done with Joseph Parker, and you're useless in that rôle. Stop! you know M. Rene Savorin?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think better of that young man than I used—in fact, I believe him a firm friend to Makofski. Here," he began scratching down an address as he spoke—"this is his address. I wish you would go, in *propriâ personâ*, of course, and try to attach yourself to *him*, until further notice."

"On the old footing?"

"On the old footing, of course. And don't let a chance slip to learn anything that you can about Crashaw, Lugos, etc."

Kenneth Hosmer, still in his workman's disguise, arose and took the written slip. "All right, Roger," he said, "shall I go at once?"

"Yes, as soon as you are out of that toggery and yourself again. You'll hear from me soon. Wait here, Ken, until we get our man upstairs, then the coast will be clear for you. Good-bye, old boy," putting out his hand; "you are sure you understand everything?"

"Oh, yes, I know my ground *now*. Don't be too hard on my poor old pal, Roger." And so they parted.

A few moments later one of the waiting officers appeared at the top of the stairs, and called down to those below,

"You're to bring up your prisoner now, Bates."

Again, as they led him forward, the prisoner, halting at the foot of the stairs, drew back and made a futile effort to free himself from his captors.

"For God's sake, don't take me up there!" he cried. "*I won't go!*"

"Yes, you *will!* Come, man, don't give yourself away. You're not going to be *hung*—yet." And, seeing his helplessness, he again submitted, and was led reluctantly up the stairs.

But, at the sight of an open door, toward which they were about to lead him, he recoiled again.

This time no words were wasted in urging. Big and athletic though he was, they mastered him easily by force of numbers, and the helpless and now trembling man was seized, borne bodily through the open door, and left standing alone in the very centre of the room, with his guards arrayed in a line between the door and himself, and with two men, the one standing the other seated, just opposite him.

The room was a bed-chamber, a gentleman's room evidently. Everything about it was sumptuous, sombre, dignified.

"Turn up those lights, Bates," said Roger Drexel; and as Bates obeyed, he approached the prisoner and touched his arm. "Look up, Joseph Parker," he said, at the same time removing the prisoner's hat and turning down his muffling coat-collar. "Mr. Lord, will you take a look at this man?"

Elias Lord, paler and thinner than of old, and with more grey in his thick hair, came slowly toward the still agitated prisoner, and looked long and earnestly in his face.

"Yes," he said, "that is the man who entered this room nearly eight months ago and pinned a letter of denunciation over my sleeping head with a keen-pointed dagger. See," turning and putting his finger upon a cut in the carved head-board, "there is the mark of the knife." He looked again into his face, and then turned abruptly to Bates, "Give this man a seat," he said.

It was given, and Joseph Parker sank into it, and raised his manacled hands, as if to wipe the big drops of perspiration from his white and twitching face.

"Give him water," again said the master of the house. And Drexel added—

"Take off his handcuffs first."

It was done, and when he had clutched the glass with unsteady hand, and gulped down the water at a draught, Parker seemed, in a measure, calmed. Although still very pale, and wearing that hunted look which is often more pathetic than actual terror upon the human face, he looked up, this time directly into the face of Elias Lord.

"Well," he said to him, "what are you going to do with me?"

Something like a glance of amusement flashed across the face of the old banker.

"I'm afraid I can't give your parole when the clock strikes two,"

he said; "but, on the other hand, I won't constrain *you* to stay with a revolver at your head. *Your* friends might not know just where to look for *you*, you know."

The prisoner winced.

"However," went on Mr. Lord, "I'm glad to find you're a man of your word. You recollect you said you would possibly come again." A pause, the prisoner writhed in his chair. "And you know *I* said I would be ready for you. As to when you go *this* time, I shall leave it to this gentleman to decide *when* you go, and *how*." He put a hand upon Drexel's arm, and moved back a pace. "Get it over," he whispered.

"Bates," said Drexel, "you and your men may wait outside, and come when you are called. Mr. Lord's servant will look to your comfort. You understand?"

"Quite, sir." Bates opened the door, and when his men had passed out, followed, and closed it behind him. When they were alone—Drexel, Lord, and the prisoner—the former drew up a chair, and, seating himself directly in front of Parker, addressed him—

"Joseph Parker, less than three years ago you were an honest man with a good trade, a home, a wife, and little children. You were respected, your conscience was clear. If anyone had predicted *then* that you would one day become a housebreaker, a companion of thieves and burglars and murderers, if they had added that you yourself would one day attempt the life of a man who had never wronged you, whom you never knew, all would have said it could not be; *you* first of all." The prisoner's head was sunk, his eyes lowered to the floor.

"Man," went on his strange accuser, "why have you thrown yourself away like this? What has dragged you down?"

Suddenly the prisoner's head went up. He answered with a sort of dogged defiance—

"If I was to tell you, you wouldn't believe me," he cried. "Want and hunger, no work, and starving children, drives many men to crime—better men than you or me, maybe. Ask that old man there what *he* knows about want and temptation. God! it's *wrong* for such men as you to judge such men as me. Drop this now. You've got me; make an example of me." His face had turned an angry red.

"And when we have made an example of you, what will become of your wife, of your little ones?"

The man writhed in his chair, and again great beads of sweat stood out upon his temples. "God!" he cried, "this is hell itself. *Curse* you! Why do you say these things?"

"Because—look at me well, Joseph Parker—*I* am the man whom you tried to murder to-night. Oh, don't wince, I know the word *kill* was not used when your masters set you on your bloody deed; but *you* know and I know that they expected your bludgeons to be so heavy, and so well-used, that they would leave me lifeless where you struck me down. I am the man you were paid to kill, I say, and if I have brought you here to-night instead of sending you to prison, it is because I am merciful. I believe you have still some manhood left, and if

you do not disappoint me, it is in my power to save you, to make you a free man once more, to send you, with your wife and children, away from this city, out of the reach of the men who hold you in their power, and with the means to begin elsewhere a new life."

Throughout this speech the man has gazed at him with incredulous eyes. Now they suddenly turn upon Elias Lord, and his countenance falls.

"Do you think that man will lose this chance to pay me? Didn't you hear what he said?"

Then Elias Lord comes forward. There is no mockery in his grave face now.

"Parker," he says, "I am a gentleman; all over this city my word is as good as my bond. Would I be likely to lie to *you* when it is quite unnecessary? Once, I admit, I would have cast you in jail, if I could have caught you; now, I think otherwise. I have learned things from this young man which have made me interested in you. Besides, I remember how much worse you *might* have done. You might have robbed my house, you might have maltreated me when I resisted you, and you did neither. No, Parker, only show that you are worthy of my friendship, and I am ready to help you, to stand your friend."

Still Parker gazes from one to the other, incredulous.

"What—what does it mean?" he gasps out. "What do you want me to do?"

Drexel takes from his pocket a slip of paper, evidently placed in readiness. It was small, and soiled, and crumpled. He holds it before the prisoner's eyes.

Parker looks, looks again and closer, turns pale, clutches at the paper, and cries, hoarsely,

"You have robbed me. I—I—*where* did you get that? Give it to me."

"Not so fast, and sit down again, Parker. No matter where I got this *now*. I *have* it, as you see. And this is what I want in exchange for your liberty. First, I want to know the full meaning of this slip of paper, this memorandum, where you got it, and from whom. What use did you make of this post-office address, and of the address of Lawyer Follingsbee? Mind, I have a clue to this matter."

"I can't," breaks in Parker; "there's nothing to tell."

"Next," goes on Drexel, "I want to know who set you on to enter this house with the help of '*the Spider*' and little Hans? Ah, that surprises you. You see I know something about these matters. Who set you on, I say, and for what reward? Also, did you have part or lot in the murder of poor Hovey on that very bed, in this very room?"

"No, no!" he cried. "I swear it. I did not, I *did not!*"

"Next, and last, I want to know the names of the men who set you on to murder *me* to-night. Come, you were caught in the act; you can't deny *that*."

Suddenly Parker turned, and looked toward the door as if searching for someone.

"Where's my—the man who was with me?" he asked, quickly.

"Never mind *him*. You can't have the benefit of his advice. If he gets off easy, it will be because *we* come to an understanding with

you. If we spare you, we shall have to let your friend go, of course."

"Is there anything else you want of me?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"No."

"Then who are you that you know, or think you know, so much? Tell me that."

Drexel leaned toward him, and whispered a few words in his ear. Their effect was magical.

From pale to red, and back to pale again, fear, anger, resentment, all speak in his face. He is upon his feet once more.

"So," he cries, "this is the trap you have set for me! All the rest was not enough, and you must add *this*. If you fear me, if you want to kill me, do it. First, you make me helpless, you drive me out, no money, no work, you toss me about like a bone among hungry dogs, and then you try to trap me like a rat in a hole. Oh, curse you and all your hellish brood. Haven't I been tortured enough for turning my voice against you, for trying to shake myself free and be a man again? But you haven't succeeded yet. I didn't bite at your bait. Come, what have you made by all this? Oh, I've been too well drilled. You've crushed the life out of me too thoroughly. I know the length of your accursed arm too well. I *hate* you; yes, I hate it all. I'll curse you, all your guilds, and circles, and groups, with my last breath. Bloodsuckers that prey upon the working-man, that's what you are. But I'm tamed, I've owned my master; once a slave always one. I'm going to do my work like the dog that I am, and ask no questions, only don't try this thing any more. I've betrayed no one and nothing. I'm not food for your butchers yet."

He stops, overcome by his own vehemence, and Roger Drexel, realizing that his moment has come, lays a firm hand upon his arm, and fixing his eye with his own clear magnetic gaze, speaks:

"Joseph Parker, ever since I chanced to hear you express yourself as being no longer a dupe of the order you have just denounced, my eye has been upon you; I knew the society was full of spies, and feared you were laying a trap for unwary feet. But I found that you had not been acting a part, and I set a watch upon you. I *know*, I have known for weeks, that you were a slave to the order, to certain men, through want and fear, and *not* through love. If I wished to denounce you, I could have done so long ago. But I, like yourself, have lived to repent my alliance with the brotherhood. It is because I am fighting it to the death that I am here, and you are here! You see *I* am not afraid to speak, and I'll tell you why. Either you tell me the truth, and so help me to crush out the men who are making the order a curse to the earth, *or you are going to prison*, not because I want to send you there, but because I *will not* be thwarted in my purpose. If you help me, you and I will, in a month's time, be rid of our enemies, and you a free and a safe man. What do you know of the old man they call 'the Spider?' What do you know of Rufus Crashaw? of M. Lugos? of Jules Passauf? Tell me the truth, and you and your wife and children shall leave this city safe, and well provided for."

The man cowered away from him, and dropped back in his chair.

"Oh, God, help me," he cried, "my wife and children! If I am not back, if I cannot give a good account of myself *this* time, my wife and babies will be made to suffer. If it were not for them—for them——"

"I can't stand this," bursts from the lips of Elias Lord, and he goes to the door, opens it, and says something to someone outside, then closing the door, turns back. "Let us give him a proof of our good faith," he says, meeting Drexel's eye. The latter nods, and for a few moments all sit silent, waiting.

And then the door opens, and Joseph Parker sees, with starting eyes, that scarce credit what they see, his wife and little ones all there before him, clean, smiling, freshly clad.

"Oh, Joe!" cries his wife, "thank these kind gentlemen, *both* of them! They have given us a home, and they say your troubles about the work and all are at an end."

Dazedly he gazes from wife to children, and then back to the two men beside him.

"What does it mean?" he gasps, weakly.

"It means this, Joe," Drexel replies, "I knew very well that you could not safely return to your home, or tread these city streets, if you did what we believe you *will* do, and turn your back upon these enemies. It remains for you to decide; to stay here, in this house, where no one will ever dream of looking for you, safe and protected, with wife and little ones, until these rascals are caged, or driven out of the country, or until we think it safe to send you all away into some pleasant village, where you shall have a home and work to do."

Still the tortured, bewildered man looks from one to another, then suddenly he turns upon Elias Lord:

"Do *you* promise this?" he cries, "promise upon your honour?—*you!*"

"Upon my honour, upon my soul! As I am a gentleman and a Christian, I promise! Come, man, help Justice against villainy, or you will have other murders on your soul; accept your own salvation. Trust us—give us your hand."

A moment he bows his head upon his hands, then lifting it, "Come what will," he cries, "I'll be a free man again, *or die!*" And he holds out his hands to the two men.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE PRINCESS IN REVOLT.

It is morning. The morning following the eve of the attack upon Captain Fernand, and the arrest of Joseph Parker, and although it is very early, the Princess Sacha Orloff has breakfasted, and is awaiting a visitor in her charming little drawing-room at the "Oriental."

An hour has passed since she was aroused by her maid, who, standing at her bedside, held a letter before her sleep-laden eyes, saying,

"Madam will pardon. The messenger was so very urgent. He

said it was a matter of *utmost* importance, and——" The rest was never uttered.

The letter was snatched from her hand, opened with eager haste, and scanned with eyes from which all trace of sleep had suddenly vanished.

And this is what the lady read, sitting erect amid her linen and lace, regardless of all save the words dancing before her burning eyes :—

"MADAM,—*The time has come.* Expect me *in an hour* from the time you receive this. And pardon the unusual hour. Moments now are as valuable as human life. "HURST."

That was all, and it was enough. And now the Princess is standing at her window, flushing and paling at every sound, with glowing, restless eyes, and fast beating heart, scarcely able to retain even the outward semblance of self-control, so long seem the passing moments.

And yet there is no delay. Just as the last of the sixty minutes is ticked off by the French clock on the mantel, the curtain is drawn aside, and "Hurst the detective"—"Roger Drexel"—stands before her.

He is as calm as ever, but her quick eye notes the pallor of his face, the lines of weariness about the dark eyes, none the less keen for that, and the unusual sternness of the firm-set lips.

There are no formalities between them at this moment, not an instant is wasted in feeble conventional greetings. Instead, as he advances, the colour suddenly leaves her face, the strength her frame, she sinks weakly into the nearest chair, and only her eyes question him.

He glances quickly around him. "Are we secure against interruption?" he asks.

She bows, and then points to the door behind the velvet curtain.

"Lock it," she whispers ; and he obeys quickly, and as quickly draws forward a chair and seats himself so near that he can touch her easily, and face to face.

"Madam, I must beg you to command yourself," he begins. "I have much to say to you, and little time in which to say it. I have fulfilled my promise, and the time has come when I must claim yours. When we parted in this room, not so long ago, you uttered these words, 'Bring me Basil Petrolowski, if he is alive, or the truth concerning him if he is dead, and I swear to render you any service within my power—anything!' Madam, have you forgotten?"

"No," she articulated.

"And are you prepared to fulfill that promise?"

She bends her burning eyes upon his face. "*Are you?*" she breathes.

"Yes."

She throws back her head and raises her clasped hands aloft as if invoking strength—composure.

"Tell me, have you found him?"

He puts out his hand and takes one of hers, placing a finger upon the throbbing pulse. "Madam," he says almost sternly, "have I

been mistaken in you? I thought you were a woman for emergencies. If we are to help each other you *must* be calm."

She snatches away her hand, and stands suddenly erect before him. "You do not *know* me, or you would never begin thus," she cries. "I *must* know the *truth*, the best or the worst. I can be calm *then*, let it be what it will. You will see."

"Very good, I take you at your word. Pray sit down again, and tell me truly, what did you hope or anticipate?"

"The worst," she says between shut teeth.

"Then be prepared. I have found out—I have found Basil Petrolowski."

"*Alive?*" The word comes from between pallid lips.

"*Dead.*"

How silent the room is. How long the woman before him sits motionless then, gazing into vacancy. In that interval, while he silently watches that set intense face, he begins to see the strength, the true nature of this strange woman. He feels, somehow, now, that she will *not* fail him.

"There is a long strange story back of this," he says after a time. "When you are able to hear it I will begin."

"Wait," she murmurs, and sits moveless as before. Presently she speaks, in low, measured, unnatural tones.

"Do you know how he died?"

"Yes."

"How?—tell me."

"By violence."

"Was it his own act?"

"No."

Something like relief crept into her face.

"How was it, then?—murder?"

"It was, at least I believe it was, *treachery*."

"Ah!" At last she moves again, she rises, and for a few moments paces the room, her face averted; then she resumes her place near him.

"Tell me everything," she says, and there is a new look in her face, a look that bodes ill for someone.

"It is a long story," he begins; "in fact, to make you understand all as I wish, you must listen to two or three stories interwoven; all with the same beginning and the same end; all involving those of whom you now most wish to hear."

"Whom do you mean?" she broke in. "Of *whom* do I most wish to hear?"

"Unless I mistake you altogether, you wish to hear, above all else, of the men who brought Basil Petrolowski to his death."

"You are *right*," she says quickly, "and *now* we understand each other."

From that moment there was, on her part, no more mystery, no denials. The secret of her interest in Basil Petrolowski's fate was a guarded secret no longer.

"When you put your case before me," he began, "giving me, however, only half confidence, I had two other matters of interest and

importance in hand, in my capacity of detective. I believe I signified as much to you?"

"Yes."

"One, the first to occupy my attention, had its importance to someone; but I scarcely think it was of so much interest to the public, although at the time it held its own as a nine days' wonder, as it was to me in person. And it became most attractive to me through my being strangely drawn to the chief actor in it. From first to last, if, indeed, it is yet ended, it was a sad tragedy. Briefly, this is the story. One night, a Sunday night, while the worshippers were pouring out from a certain popular up-town church, one of the homeward-bound church-goers, a gentle, innocent, harmless old man, was waylaid and shot down in the street. It chanced that two of my acquaintances were so near at hand that they were able to reach the spot before the man who had fired the shot had left his victim's side. Indeed, he had not made the slightest attempt to escape; he gave himself up willingly, and neither then nor after would he open his lips as to the murder. He would not give his name, nor his motive for the deed. When his trial came on he refused to accept counsel, and he pleaded guilty without attempting to establish an extenuating circumstance."

"Gracious heavens!" In spite of herself she has grown interested in this weird story. "And was that allowed; here, in this land of justice?"

"It would not have been; the court was on the point of naming a lawyer for his defence, when the head of one of the first law-firms in the city, a man whose very name was a power, came forward and announced himself as counsel for the prisoner. But all was in vain, the strange man would not talk with him, would admit nothing, deny nothing. All means were tried, all were useless. In such a case, and with the prisoner pleading guilty, what could a lawyer do? The man was condemned, and he died upon the scaffold mutely, a mystery still."

"But the lawyer; I can't comprehend. You say he retained him?"

"Ah, no; not the prisoner. There was another mystery. The lawyer, a Mr. Follingsbee, was retained by an anonymous correspondent, who paid a large fee, but did not make him or herself known."

"Not to the prisoner?"

"Not to the prisoner—not to *anyone*. But let me finish the story. I had grown interested in this strange case, and the strange, mute prisoner. I obtained admission to his cell; I tried to gain his confidence, and, at the last, although he never became confidential, he unbent, and talked upon impersonal subjects ably, in a manner which won my regard. I had not known the man whom he killed, but, as the trial progressed, I chanced to see his picture, and I was struck with its resemblance to a man I know well. And suddenly, upon that, together with such knowledge as I had of this man, and of the victim, I formed a theory. At the last moment, for I was with the condemned man in his last moments, I put my new belief to the test, and learned two things."

"And they?" eagerly.

"First, this man who was about to die had belonged to a powerful secret society."

"Ah! That, then, would account for the lawyer and his fee."

"That is how I reasoned. And next, the man was expiating a worse than useless crime—he had *killed the wrong man*."

"Ah! Heavens!"

"This much the unhappy man did not deny. But his admissions ended there."

"And you never learned his name?"

"Not from him. I have learned it since, as well as much of his melancholy history."

"In what way?"

"Pardon! May I proceed in my own way?" he asks gently.

"Yes, go on. I will be patient; I have promised."

"Having learned that Jacob Traill had died because of his fatal resemblance to another, I next turned my attention to that other. The dead man and his living counterfeit were not of a common type, nor was this my only reason for believing that I had my finger upon the man in whose stead Jacob Traill had been sacrificed. This man not only was the counterfeit of Traill, but he was an attendant at this *same church* at which Traill worshipped, and near which he was killed. The two men lived in *the same neighbourhood* though on different streets. You can readily see how easily a man who had seen one of these men a few times perhaps, and knew where he lived, could make this fatal mistake. On the whole, knowing that Jacob Traill was the wrong man, I readily settled upon *Elias Lord* as the right one."

He has spoken the last words with his eyes scanning her face, and he sees her start as he speaks the name.

"Elias—Lord!" she ejaculates.

"That is the name. You have heard it before, perhaps?"

"Never mind that now." She has controlled herself again. "Go on."

"Jacob Traill was a harmless man," he resumes, "but one had not far to seek, if the victim *had* been Lord, to find an enemy and a motive."

"Ah!"

"Yes; Elias Lord was an active worker against a powerful society working in secret to overturn the present order of things. To depose money, monopoly, and bring about the poor man's millennium. Elias Lord was an open enemy, I say, and had been *marked* by his foes. I knew thus much, and I also knew that this great society had secretly become doubly dangerous, doubly formidable, because of a new element, with power in its hands, which had lately come into it, at the fountain-head from over the water. I had already determined to devote myself to the task of unearthing these dangerous new leaders, and of driving them out of the country if possible, and I had also awakened to the knowledge that my father's old friend and mine, Elias Lord, was in constant danger, when I was summoned into your presence, and heard as much as you then chose to tell me about Basil Petrolowski and his disappearance. This was why I told you I had other matters of importance to occupy much of my time."

"I remember," she says sharply. "Go on."

"I see you are growing interested and I will not delay. At present I will dispense, as much as possible, with details. I think your imagination will aid you in following me."

"Go on," she says again, impatiently.

"I will, and I will be frank. At this stage of our game there is nothing to be gained by concealment. Shortly after the death of the mysterious, nameless prisoner, I was at the house of Elias Lord, and there I was made acquainted with a young girl, a Miss Moina La Croix."

"Ah?"

"We were made acquainted by my hostess, who had crossed the water quite recently in Miss La Croix's company. On board was also the father of Miss La Croix. There were two other passengers who were presented, my hostess told me, to herself, *and mark* this, and to *Mr. La Croix and his daughter.*"

"Yes?"

"I left the house a little in advance of the lady, and upon coming out—my detective training made me at once aware of a man, a *spy*, in fact, who was watching the house—myself—or some other inmate—of course, I could not guess which. Naturally I in turn, watched the spy, and I soon found that he was shadowing Miss La Croix. He followed her home and I followed him. By so doing, I was so fortunate as to see the two other passengers, who had been presented *as strangers* to the young lady and her father, entering the La Croix residence quite like familiars. The names of these two men were—Rufus Crashaw and Rene Savorin."

"I see," murmurs the Princess.

"Now, at this point, I must remind you that I had made up my mind to find out those men who, I knew, had recently arrived from abroad to introduce their system of anarchy and bloodshed, to bring about revolution—a new reign of terror. Seeing these men at La Croix's door aroused a startling train of conjectures. I had not met Miss La Croix that day for the first time. Less than a week before I had seen her amid far different surroundings; it was at a meeting of *anarchists*, and I was there in disguise. Miss La Croix was *also* there as a spectator, with *Rene Savorin* as escort; and her father *was the speaker of the evening*, introduced *by Rufus Crashaw*. Now this would indicate some degree of intimacy between the four, and their appearance at the La Croix's, as I have described, would confirm it. Of course, then and there, I set them down as socialists. Equally, of course, I did not speak of this first meeting with Miss La Croix at Mr. Lord's."

"No."

"But when my hostess told me clearly how those four people, travelling from Europe to America by the same steamer, chose to seem strangers to each other, my interest redoubled. I knew, by what I had seen, that they could *not* have been strangers, and I knew there must have been a strong motive for concealment. Then, shortly after my meeting with you, a horrible thing happened. There was a dinner-party at Elias Lord's, Miss La Croix being one of the guests. She came and went early, in fact, she was the first to leave, and, just upon

the heels of her going, while most of the remaining guests were in the reception-hall preparing to take their leave, an infernal machine, introduced into the house, no one knew how, exploded in the hands of the host, injuring him seriously."

"What?" cries the Princess.

"Does that surprise you? Well, upon questioning the servants it was made to appear that Miss La Croix stood for a moment by the table from which Lord took the fatal box, and it was *thought* that she had something in her hand."

The Princess makes an impatient movement.

"It *did* seem indefinite. Of course, an investigation was begun at once, and I then learned from one of the ladies of the family that Mr. Lord had been the recipient of at least *two* warning letters. I obtained possession of the letters, and while searching in other directions, as I was bound to do, I put the La Croix, Savorin, and Crashaw all under close *surveillance*. *Before* that time, and for the sole reason that you had aroused vague suspicions in me by not being more frank in telling me your story, I had also put a watch upon *you*."

"Ah—indeed!"

"And you may fancy my surprise when, after some days, one of my men reported to me that you had received two visitors, one of them being Rene Savorin, and the other—my *spy*, whom I had seen *following Moina La Croix*."

Madam the Princess draws a sudden sharp breath.

"M. Hurst," she exclaims, "you are a clever man."

"Thank you. Do you begin to see the *dénoûement*?"

"No, not altogether. Pray continue."

"Having learned thus much, I determined to know more; to know what it is that connects my client with the men who I now suspect are the leaders of the new revolution. I have long been a detective. I have travelled much abroad. Without relaxing my vigilance here, I put myself at once in communication with authorities, official and other, in London, in Paris, in Vienna, St. Petersburg, Odessa. In following up Crashaw, I have found a certain M. Lugos much in his society, and often with him at the La Croix's. I include M. Lugos among my subjects for inquiry. I also include the name of the *Prince Vladimir Orloff* and *Basil Petrolowski*."

"Ah!" The eyes of the Princess flash angrily now; but she curbs her speech, and he goes on unmoved.

"In due time my reports from Europe begin to flow in. You may have heard the name of *Bologsy*?"

She starts, and nods assent.

"There are three of them, all detectives; one at Paris, two in Russia. Much that is most valuable comes from them. I know the source, and so have no need to question the reports. Need I tell you all that they contain? Assuredly *not*. I have thus, in my hand, the missing links; the chain is almost complete. What I learn concerning La Croix, Lugos, Crashaw, and of their manner of life abroad, and my inquiries in London led to much that was helpful, assured me that *here* I had that 'Superior Council,' which, unseen, unknown, by the lower groups and circles, manipulates them all. Of Madam La

Princess, too, I had learned that which might warrant me in identifying her with this 'Superior Council.'" He takes a folded memorandum from his pocket. "Permit me to read a few paragraphs taken from one of the M. Bologsy's documents; it will help you to follow me the more readily," he says.

"Read, then."

"It is but a paragraph out of pages, please to recollect." He begins to read--

"'MADAM LA PRINCESS ORLOFF.—*This lady, it is thought by many, is secretly interested in matters political, the late Prince Orloff having been one of the bitterest of the enemies of the revolutionary party, and her father also. It is thought that the Princess is perpetuating their work; certainly she stands high in diplomatic and official circles. There is another rumour, not by any means so widely circulated, known only to the police, in fact. This rumour has it that the Princess, while assuming to be devoted to the party of the palace, is, in reality, in sympathy with the nihilists; and that a certain active revolutionist, who disappeared from Odessa more than a year ago under circumstances of the strangest, was, in reality, her devoted friend. Rumour is divided as to the cause of her leaving Russia. By some this young man is thought to be the magnet; but generally it is supposed that the mission of the Princess abroad is strictly political, in the Russian sense of the word.*'"

"That is," comments she, "a spy."

Drexel lays the memoranda down upon his knee.

"You will see," he goes on, "by this how, after learning of M. Savorin and the man known to me as 'the Spider,' in connection with yourself, and after reading *this*," tapping the paper, "I was ready to connect *you* with the '*Superior Council*,' or that part of it which comes from abroad. But now I will hasten on. I had arrived at the point when I thought it best to keep a redoubled watch upon all. At first Crashaw kept his residence hidden by changing often, and for some days it was hard to run M. Lugos to earth. But I also wished to find the old man known as 'the Spider,' for I had traced the dynamite box to him."

"The dynamite box!"

"That which had caused the injury to Elias Lord, the banker, on the evening of his dinner. There had been a basket of flowers delivered at the upper door, at the last moment, by a boy. It was easy to find the florist who sent it, and through him I traced the boy whom he sent with the flowers; but here the first complication arose. This boy had *not* delivered the flowers. He had first been bribed to entrust the basket to other hands, and then lured into a thronged thoroughfare, decoyed into a crowd, and there struck down, and left for dead, by '*the Spider*.' I found this boy dying in the hospital, and it was many days before he could tell his story. When he did—it threw light on some dark places."

And now the Princess is very pale.

"Tell me," she says. "This boy—is he still living?"

"He is slowly dying."

"Go on."

"Next I found the boy who had been the tool of 'the Spider,' the boy who had placed the flowers, *and the dynamite box*, upon Mr. Lord's table."

"One moment. This last boy—who is he?"

"A poor little fellow, apparently quite friendless, and forced to do the bidding of 'the Spider' and an evil old woman."

"And—where is he *now?* Is he in their power still?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Man, can't you *see?* If the lad has betrayed 'the Spider,' and is still in his power——"

"The boy is safe, and where I can find him when I want him; he is too valuable to lose sight of. It was he who opened Elias Lord's door months ago, and let in an emissary of the council to warn Lord, by means of a letter and 'the *dagger in the wood*,' that the council had marked him for its own. And, again, this boy was a most useful tool. When the footman was killed——"

"What footman?"

"Elias Lord's footman. Am I to understand that you did not know of *this?*"

"I did not. Tell me."

"Hovey, the footman, was stabbed while sleeping in his master's bed. It was another case of *the wrong man*, another sacrifice to the council."

There is a frown upon madam's face.

"So!" she says, as if to herself, "*I am enlightened!*" Then, "And this—this person whom you call 'the Spider'—what of him?"

"You are interested. Do you *know* him?"

"Never mind; only keep that lad who betrayed him out of his way."

"Never fear for little Hans; beside, 'the Spider' will soon be under arrest. He is closely guarded even now."

"What! are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Tell me—tell me, *how* did you run down that man?" There is a new animation and interest in her voice.

"I will. Why not? One night, not long since, a person called Makofski—you have heard of him?—Makofski, while upon the street at night, and just after parting most amicably with no less a personage than Dr. Lugos, was assaulted by ruffians, who attacked him with bludgeons and a knife, and, being worsted, escaped in a cab at hand for that purpose."

"*Ah!*"

"Is that, too, a surprise to you?"

"Yes. Go on!"

"Makofski was sure that he had left a mark upon his assailant in the shape of a broken arm, and being on the look-out, chanced to hear M. Lugos say, on the following day, that he had been called upon to attend an injured man the night previous, the night of the assault. That morning Lugos and Makofski were again upon the street together. Nothing of special importance happened, except that

Makofski ran against a man who *seemed* to be half drunk ; and during a brief altercation, this seemingly drunken man had ample opportunity to study M. Lugos. You guess the rest, perhaps ?"

"Easily—when you—when M. Makofski and M. Lugos parted company, the seemingly drunken man followed M. Lugos."

"Precisely."

"I wonder that he was able to deceive that man."

"Lugos ?"

"Lugos."

"The man who followed Lugos in no way resembled the man who had thrust himself in the way of Makofski."

"And the result ?"

"Nothing that day, but success the next. 'The Spider' is placed, his broken bones are mending. He is well enough now to go to jail. And now, madam, need I say more? Do you not see to the end ?"

"Not quite. Having learned so much, why was it necessary for you to carry on that monstrous masquerade. *Why* did you drag Fernand Makofski from his grave to assume his character, and in that character, seek shelter under Miles La Croix's roof ?"

"Need you ask *that*. Because, then, my information was too general ; because I needed to know *the rôle each man was playing* in this desperate game. Who was the *real*, as well as the nominal head. Because it was the quickest and surest way of learning their innermost secrets ; and, in order to get these men into my power, I *must* know these. It was the *surest way*."

"And the most deadly dangerous !"

"I assumed the name of Makofski, because I chanced to know enough of the man's history, and of Russian officers, political and other, to enable me to enact the rôle ; because, too, I knew it was the rôle most likely to open all their doors to me. Among honest patriots, such an one as Miles La Croix is, or was, before he became a monomaniac, I knew Fernand Makofski would have been warmly welcomed. But these miscreants fear everybody, for they are labouring, not for liberty, but for base selfish ends."

Madam the Princess rises and paces the length of the room, something is rousing her, stirring her, strangely.

"Man !" she says, at last, coming back to her place ; "you have, no doubt, been in many perilous situations, braved many dangers. I believe you are a brave man, but—I shudder, when I think of the risk you have run, and are still running. I will not ask you *why* you have done all this. We are past motives ; but tell me, in mercy's name, *why* have you told *me—me*, of all women, this story of your daring ? Do you know what you have *done ?*"

He pushes back his chair and rises to face her.

"Because," he says, slowly, "I have reached a point where I can no longer act alone. I must have help, and *you* 'of all women,' of *all human beings*, are the one who can *and must* help me."

They are face to face now, and she draws herself up to her fullest height, and looks in his face.

"When I pledged myself to do anything which was in my power, in return for knowledge that would have been, to me, almost priceless,

I was sincere in that promise. I am ready to fulfil it now. Money, any sum, is yours, when I have heard *all*, any other thing that is mine to give, but—if you mean to ask me to help you in hunting down these men, you are asking what is *not* in my power," she comes still closer, there is a ring of triumph in her voice ; "and this is why. Of Rufus Crashaw, M. Lugos, Miles La Croix, as *men*, as personalities, I have nothing to say. I care nothing. As members, *officers*, if you will, of a great organization, I must say this. You have made a mistake, Sir Detective, in being thus frank with me. You have shown me your hand, I now let you see mine. I shall *warn* these men at *once!* I cannot permit harm to come to them, for—they are members of the society *in which* I hold a place—*the place of their superior ;* their dictator, if I choose to use my authority. Those men, whatever their misdeeds, are *useful* to our order, M. Hurst. You cannot *harm them through me.*"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

LIFTING THE VEIL.

AGAIN, as on another night when Fernand Makofski was arraigned before this dainty tigress, she throws back her head and awaits his answer in triumph. This time she is sure of her victory ; her position is unassailable now.

But again, as on that other night, his face is inscrutable.

"Madam," he asks, as if arguing his case ; "do you, then, act as the executive ! Am I to understand that you sanctioned the deed by which Mr. Lord's servant lost his life ? "

"I have said—I know nothing of that deed."

"Nor of the dynamite box ?"

"Nothing."

"Were you, perchance, aware, that three separate attempts to assassinate 'Fernand Makofski' have failed ?"

"No ! Is *that* true ?"

"Quite true ; but there is still another question. Knowing the truth, why did you allow me to continue my masquerade, in the character of Captain Makofski ?"

"I will be frank. First, I was not given the authority I now hold until quite recently, and I have not yet made that authority known to the council."

"Ah—I see."

"Next. I let you go on, because I was over-anxious about my own interests. I even fancied that your presence in the house of La Croix might be needful and in *my* interest in some manner."

"And you were right. Madam, you have been too hasty. If you will resume your seat, I will now finish that which I wish to say ; and, as you have declared yourself against me, let me tell you what the service is, which I ask, and expect, at your hands."

"Go on."

"First—in the general reckoning Miles La Croix, his daughter, M. Rene Savorin, and one other must go unscathed ; no harm must reach them, no suspicion rest upon them. Having told you this, you,

perhaps, can see *why* I do not choose to turn all this over to the police?"

"I see. Go on," she says.

"Second. The man called '*the Spider*,' and some others of lesser importance, *will* be left to the private police, or detectives. Third—I look *to you* to rid us, this city, your order, the world, if need be, of three *men*."

"Their names?"

"Crashaw, Lugos, Passauf."

"You are mad!"

"We will see. Let us now go back to your friend Basil Petrolowski."

"To Basil——" ah, she is in her place again, and he sits down opposite her, and now he hurries on paying little heed to her interjections.

"This," he begins, "is the story of Basil Petrolowski. Among the many other questions sent to Bologsy in Russia, was this:—'*What can you learn about the last six months of B. P. spent in Russia?*' Here is his answer, in briefest words:—'*He was connected with the revolutionists and devoted to their cause. He was denounced, and a certain man, high in favour, asked for authority to deal with the culprit. This man had a private grudge, some say an injury, to avenge. He had a fair wife, and it is just whispered that there was jealousy at the bottom of the feud. This man, he died soon after the disappearance of Petrolowski, contrived to get his way.*' Petrolowski's case was put into his hands. First, Petrolowski was sent to Paris on a trumped-up secret mission. Arriving in Paris, he found himself amongst strangers, and denounced as an emissary of the Russian police. A mock trial resulted, in what they called a test of loyalty. He was to prove himself by going to America with sealed orders. That is to say, to execute some plan which would only be revealed to him when in New York. There was no alternative, he knew he could never return to Russia until he stood acquitted of the charge of disloyalty to the circle. He consented to sail for New York, and now, just as he is about to sail, he encounters a familiar face, the face of a man calling himself Croizon. Croizon was once a traveller in Russia, visiting parts of Siberia, some of the penal settlements and mines, and many of the Russian cities. Sight-seeing '*under the protection of the Tsar*.'"

"Ah," she cries, "vilest of all! An alien spy! A spy for hire alone!"

"That is it. Well, this 'spy for hire,' this man with no wrongs to right, who sold men for gold, had met Petrolowski in Odessa, and he renewed the acquaintance, for he *chanced* to come to New York by the same steamer."

"Chanced? Ah, I see!"

"Once in New York, however, the two men separated, meeting seldom and only by chance. And now I will read to you a portion, at least, of a confession made and taken down last night. It is the confession of an unfortunate man, who has been a tool in the hands of others, and it contains the sequel to what we know of Basil Petrolowski."

He has taken a second paper from his pocket, and opening it, he

at once begins to read. The document is formally begun, giving date of writing and full name of the "deponent." But Drexel passes over this, and omitting the name of Joseph Parker wherever it occurs, reads on composedly, while she listens with growing emotion as the narrative progresses.

"I am thirty-nine years old and a mechanic. Until two years ago I lived in the town of N—— with my wife and children, and earned enough to live on, being a good workman, and having constant employment, until the trade and labour unions became established among us, and every man must belong to one or more, or be boycotted and fight them all. At first I thought they were a blessing to the poor man, but, by and by, as I studied them more and saw their workings, I concluded that the ones who got the most benefit were the men at the top, the organizers and chief officers. These men fixed our wages for us, told us when we should work, and when we must strike ; and whether we worked or struck, we paid our dues just the same, and whether *we* drew wages or drew none, the salaries, and big ones, of the leaders went on. Finding out these things and thinking about them made me dissatisfied. And when I began to express my opinion, I at once got the name of a malcontent, a breeder of trouble. Then the strikes began along our line, and I was ordered 'off' and 'on.' Off, when I was satisfied with my wages and needed them, for winter was coming on. Then trouble began among the unions, some men wanted to strike for every little personal matter, and others, who were mostly the steady ones, were for working on and making the best of matters. Well, the strikers got the upper hand, and we went out, and men that ought to have had help didn't get it, and some that didn't deserve help did get it, and I got discouraged and disgusted, and in the midst of a big strike, I renounced the union and moved to a new town to start afresh. I won't dwell on what followed, everywhere my record followed me, I was denounced as an enemy of the unions, a trouble-maker, and it was one long series of struggles in one place and another, getting a place and being discharged, or else driven out by the union men, until, as another winter came on, and I was almost penniless, I determined to make a bold move, and I took the little we had, and brought my wife and children to the city ; that was two years ago.

"I had better have gone straight to the devil then and there. In the city things went from bad to worse, until want stared me in the face. I had sworn that I would live without the unions, but, in the city, the unions ruled everything. They drove me out of every place I tried for, and at last I began to see that I must go back or see my family starve. About the time I began to think this, I got to dropping in at a saloon that was a sort of gathering place for all kinds of reformers, socialists, anarchists, agitators, and there I met a man calling himself *Croizon ;* he made some advances toward acquaintance, although he was well-dressed and I was shabby ; and, at first, I thought he was an organizer for some society, he seemed so well posted. He was very friendly, and one night when he had treated me until I was hardly myself, and finished the business by pressing upon me a small loan, I told him the story of my miserable

failures and the cause, laying all of the blame, of course, at the door of the unions.

"It's of no use to dwell upon that part of my story. It took him a little time to do it, but finally he prevailed upon me to enter *his* order, promising to befriend me and see me through, and binding me to him by loaning me more money. He promised to get me work at once, but one week and another went by, and he explained the delay plausibly, and brought me more money, telling me that my new lodge looked after its members, that when I was necessarily idle it would see me through, and it expected when it called upon me for a service, that I would be ready.

"Well it was at the time when so many men lay out of work for long months, and many shops were closed down, and so I did not wonder much that no work was found for me; they paid me my weekly allowance, or, rather, Croizon did. He was disburser for my district, he said, and so time passed, until one day I was sent for, to attend the meeting of a special committee, it was *Croizon* again, who notified me."

"*Croizon*," breaks in the Princess. "Do I know that man, M. Hurst?"

"Patience—you shall see."

"Do I know the writer of this 'confession'?"

"I think not. Permit me to go on."

"Go on, then."

"I was present at this meeting part of the time, waiting in an ante-room, and, of course, not hearing all that was said. It seemed that a man was wanted who could be trusted to do a bit of business for the order of which I had been made a member. I was first sworn to secrecy, and then told what I had to do. It seemed simple enough, I was to answer an advertisement."

"Ah!" ejaculates the Princess. Then, as if vexed with herself, "go on, pray!"

"I was shown the advertisement, it was simple enough, it ran like this:—'*To C. and S.C., from Paris to New York, yesterday. Await your commands.*—MEDIUM!' And the number to which a reply was to be sent, followed like a postscript.

"They told me to take a pen and write like this:—

"'MEDIUM.—*Appoint a place of meeting, and give me a sign for to-morrow, a.m. As soon as I accost you, put this note into my hand, and receive your instructions.*—L.C. *and* S.C.'

"I wrote this down and it was posted. The next day I was at hand at the hour appointed and was sent to receive the reply from 'Medium.' It was there and it said, as nearly as I can remember:—'*Central Park, at Eighth and Seventy-ninth Streets, near Hunter's Gate. Young man, tall, brown eyes and hair, will carry underneath arm a lacquered cane, with carved head in onyx.*'"

"Ah, *Heaven!*" almost shrieks the Princess, but he reads rapidly on.

"That was the answer. And then they gave me my instructions. I expected to carry a letter, but they schooled me to say certain words which were almost meaningless to me. I remember *all* of that message; how could I help it?"

"Well—I went to the Hunter's Gate, and there was the young man with the onyx-headed cane. He was very handsome, but pale, and with a troubled look in his eyes. Something about his look, and his voice when he spoke, made me think that he was not an American. I set him down as being French. I went up to him and said, 'Good morning, Mr. Medium,' as if that were his name. He looked me over for a moment, and then said, 'What can I do for you, sir?' 'Give me my note,' said I. This satisfied him, and he gave me back my note.

"Then, standing close beside him, I repeated to him these words,

"'*This is the decision of the Council. They will not receive you. It is best for them who are to remain and work here, that you do not meet. As for you, as soon as your mission is accomplished, you will return to Paris, and from thence to Russia, as the bearer of papers which we shall send, for reasons which you will comprehend, from this port to Paris, via post.*' When I had said these words I could see his face light up, and I heard him whisper, '*Back to Russia?*' as if he was glad to go. Then I went on,

"'*These are the commands of the Council:—A certain man is to be* TRANSFERRED. *If he remains here he will do harm to the cause. This is your work. He must be gone before you can leave. All is left to you as to method. It will not be difficult.*'

"When I had said this, I paused and waited for a reply. I never saw a more ghastly face. He seemed turned into stone. He did not look at me nor speak, and so I went on and uttered the closing words of my verbal message,

"'*Remember your oath,*' *I said.* '*Do this and go back to Russia free and vindicated. This is final.*'

"Then the man groaned so loud that I feared he would be heard.

"'My oath!' he said—not to me, but to himself—'God forgive me!'—and then I suppose my stare brought him to his senses, for he looked at me friendly for a moment, and then asked,

"'Is there anything more?'

"I told him nothing, except a card, and this I gave to him. It contained the name and address of the man who was to be '*transferred*,' and some notes of instruction as to how to find him. I knew that much; but the name and all the rest *was written in French.*

"As God is my judge, I did *not* know the true meaning of any part of that message. If I *had*—but it's no use saying that—I did not know nor guess—not until after. And I never saw this young man—but once—after that.

"They paid me so well for this hour's service, that for a month or more we got on very well. But still there was no work for me, though I kept trying. Then in about five weeks they sent for me again, this same 'executive.' This time I was to secure a post-office box at one of the suburban offices; it must be a *lock-box*, and, after getting it, I was to contrive to get a letter into the hands of a certain lawyer, a Mr. Follingsbee. I got the post-office box, and next morning I got the letter into the lawyer's hands. The *next* morning there was a letter in

the box. I took it to the 'executive,' and for two or three weeks thought little of the matter. Croizon had found me a place to work.

"But one day I dropped in at Olim's, that is the saloon where I first met Croizon, and there I picked up one of the illustrated police papers, and saw there the pictures of a murder. It was the murder of an old man who was killed as he was going home from church. As I read about it I came across the name of Lawyer Follingsbee; something came over me then, and I couldn't rest until I had seen the man who did the killing. I don't know *now* what I expected, but I was uneasy until the trial opened, and when it did I left my work and hung about the court until I caught sight of the prisoner, which was not until all was over, and he had been condemned; and *then*—ah! can I ever forget it!—*it was the young man I had met in the park.* Then I was half a madman. I went in search of Croizon, and when I found him I almost assaulted him. Ah! *then* the man showed his teeth—let me see how I had sold myself, put myself into his power, threatened, and at last cowed me.

"I can't talk about that time. I knew now what '*transferred*' meant in the executive circle; I had lost my place again by leaving it to follow up that trial, to see the prisoner, and I could get no more. Croizon let me alone until we were at our last dollar, and then he came again. He offered me another paying job, and I had grown so reckless that I told him I would do anything but steal and kill. So he took me to a place where there was an ugly, mean, little old man, that some called '*Papa*,' and some 'the Spider,' and I was drilled to a new trade. This time some one was to be *warned* only. I made sure, *this* time, that I knew what the word *meant.*

"When I had been well drilled in my part, we, 'the Spider,' myself, and a little boy called Hans, went to the house—*to this house*—for I am dictating this in the house of Mr. Elias Lord. We came to this house and 'the Spider' cut out one of the side-lights at the rear door, next the alley, and we put Hans through the narrow opening, and the boy opened the door, and then my part began.

"We knew that all the servants were gone, and that the master of the house was all alone, for the house had been watched closely for days. And, as I started to go up the back stairs, the old Spider whispered after me, 'No violence, Joe, *unless* he makes a *noise*, and then *use the knife.*' Mr. Lord knows how I did my work. I pinned the warning letter at his bed-head with the point of a dagger—a dagger that bore the coat of arms of the executive, if anyone knew how to interpret it."

Here he lifts his eyes, and sees that the Princess is lying back in her low chair, very pale—ghastly, indeed—and with eyes fixed upon something afar.

"Have I your attention, madam?" he asks.

"My attention—my attention to *that!* What is Elias Lord to *me!* Leave that; and tell me—tell me *now*, who was the young man with the brown hair and eyes, the young man who *died*—on—the—scaffold?" Her voice is husky now; she is bending toward him, clutching his arm

in a vice-like grip. "Tell me—*tell me!* I can endure this no longer!"

"Perhaps it is best. That young man, sacrificed as much as ever was his victim, was—*Basil Petrolowski.*"

"I knew it!" she whispers. "I *feared* it from the first!" and then she totters to her feet, her face full of an unutterable woe. "Have mercy upon me!" she articulates, "leave me—just for one hour!"

What man could refuse? Not Roger Drexel, even though his moments now are so precious. He goes down to the office, and there passes an uneasy hour.

When he returns to the boudoir, he finds the Princess awaiting him, and so haggard that he could easily imagine her to have passed through, not an hour, but a year, of woe. But the storm had passed. She is calm again, and eager to resume.

"I am waiting," she says, and then, as he takes his former place, goes on, "I think, before I fully understood—in speaking of this—this prisoner—you said that—you were with him at the last?"

"Yes."

"Tell me more. Was he calm? What did he say to you?"

"Very little, except to thank me for my interest. I besought him to trust me, to let me serve him; but he was firm. There was no complaint, no repining. He was firm, manly to the last."

"Thank you." For a moment she bows her head, then "I can understand it," she says, in a strangely hushed tone; "he could not tell you his story, could not leave any message for us, for his mother or me, without revealing the whole truth. Don't you see? He *must* tell how basely he was entrapped and betrayed, or brand himself as a wilful murderer. He could *die* in silence rather than *that*—and," lifting her head suddenly, "*he knew me.* He knew that letting me hear the truth through you would be simply to leave me a legacy of vengeance! Ah! Basil! Basil! by dying in silence you hoped to spare me! But it was not to be! And *you shall be avenged after all!* Yes, and vindicated. Do you not see, Basil Petrolowski *could* not but die in silence? A martyr!" Her voice is still calm, but it is a fearful calm. "Am I not right? You who knew him, say. Was he not a martyr?"

"And a hero," adds Drexel, gravely.

"A martyr and a hero—yes; and—was he not also—*betrayed?*"

"Without a doubt."

"Tell me—tell me, without more words, *who* betrayed him?"

"Do you not guess?"

"I *dare* not guess! Tell me."

"Madam La Princess, I will be more generous than you were to me an hour ago; and yet my enemies and yours are identical."

"Mine!"

"I will make all clear to you, if you will listen calmly; otherwise, we are wasting time." Again he takes the roll of memoranda from his pocket, and casts his eye down the page. "Did you ever hear of this man Croizon before to-night?"

"I seem to have heard the name, but can recall nothing. You say he has been in Russia?"

"Yes."

"And as a spy?"

"Yes. Permit me to read two more extracts from M. Bologsy."

"Go on."

"It concerns this Croizon," beginning to read. "'The man calling himself Croizon is an Englishman, who was once engaged in manufacturing pursuits in the West of England, with an older brother, who bore with him until forbearance ceased to be a virtue; and who, when the villain was at last forced to leave England, provided for him liberally, only stipulating that he never return to England. We next hear of him in Russia, where, as a paid emissary of the government, he is making the tour of the prisons and free commands; making friends of the convicts, offering to carry letters, and betraying the poor wretches who trusted him; for this, of course, he was well paid. There is no evidence that he had an active hand in the disappearance of young Petrolowski, but, it *is* known that he made the young man's acquaintance at St. Petersburg; that he left for Paris just one week before the disappearance of Petrolowski; that the two met in Paris; and that they embarked for New York upon *the same steamer.*'" He puts down the memoranda. "You have already heard how these two arrived in New York, and then separated; and now I will go back to the narrative of Joseph Parker."

"Of Joseph Parker?"

"That is the name of the man who carried the instructions to the young man in the park; but Joseph Parker did not know that this man's name was Basil Petrolowski; nor that the executive, which made him its go-between, numbered Croizon as one of themselves. And now let me ask you, Did you know Rufus Crashaw abroad?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because the man Croizon and Rufus Crashaw are one and the same."

She utters a sharp cry. "And the others, then—*the others!*"

"Are M. Lugos, Jules Passauf, and a man, whom, as yet, I have not been able to run down, by name—Tansig."

"Crashaw—Lugos!" She stares at him and is lost in amazement.

"These are the men; and now let me tell you so much as I can of their plot against Petrolowski. You admit that he had powerful enemies in Russia."

"I admit *everything*. The time for concealment is past. Basil Petrolowski was my playmate in childhood, my comrade in youth. He was my *only* friend, I loved him; but I was a wife, and he was an honest man; we never met, save in his mother's house and his mother's presence. Prince Vladimir Orloff was all evil; he could not conceive of such a state of affairs. One day there was a terrible scene at the castle. He accused me of caring for Basil, and I owned it, and gloried in it, and defied him. He threatened—threatened us both, but nothing seemed to come of it; and when, some time after, Basil's mother gave me a little note of farewell, and told me he was

sent to Prussia upon an affair of state, we believed it. It was only when he never came back, that we began to fear and doubt. Then the Prince died. Ah, heaven! how plainly I see it all now! Upon his dying bed he told me that he was leaving me all his fortune, for he was certain *now*, that when he was dead, I would be no more to Petrolowski *than to him*. It was after that that I received those few words from this side of the water; I see it all. They had sent him to Paris, and there accused him, tried him, and offered him the choice of coming to New York upon a secret mission, or of taking the black letter."

"What is that?"

"A death-warrant."

"Once here," she hurries on, "he learns, for the first time, what it is that he has sworn to do. I wonder if you know how terrible their oaths are."

"I think I do; but go on."

"He knew himself entrapped. He wrote me on the eve of that awful deed. He did not *mean* to escape; and if he had tried those men would have betrayed him."

"No doubt."

"But at last they are unmasked. Tell me," turning upon him suddenly, "what were you about to ask of me when——"

"When you turned upon me and took Crashaw under your protection?"

"Don't waste words upon that," she cries, impatiently. "What did—what *do* you want?"

"Are you ready to help me now?"

For answer she puts out her hand.

"You have yourself told that in the organization which they represent here, you hold by secret appointment a superior position."

"Yes," impatiently.

"And they are not yet made aware of this."

"True."

"Is it not in your power to depose him? or, at least, to stay their activity for a time? Could you not cause them to be removed from office, if you choose?"

"S——yes," reluctantly. "Then, listen," she says. "Did you ever hear of one Sharlaw?"

"Yes. He is the brains, the power, the leader of leaders, a wonderful man."

"At least he is not an assassin. *He* is devoted, heart and soul, to a cause which, mistaken or not, he believes in. This man is, as you say, the captain par excellence. '*The master*,' he is called. Well, this man is my friend. This man believes in me. It is *because* he believes in me, and because he has begun to doubt his agents here, that he has so lately put authority into my hands. I am frank; do you be the same. Will it really serve your purpose? be all-sufficient, if I deprive these men of their power, command them, compel them, to abandon all action for a time?"

"Yes; the rest I shall be equal to. Only give me time to remove an old man and a helpless girl—to get them into a safe shelter, and

then—the law can deal with these miscreants. I have enough proof against them."

"The *law!*" she cries, aghast. "You would give them over *to the law?*"

"Why not? Are they too good for it?"

"Good? Bah! Tell me, how would the law punish them—the best and the worst?"

"They would be forced to leave the country, at the least. Imprisonment, perhaps for life, at most."

"And will that satisfy *you?*"

"To break up this dangerous band; to save those now menaced; to free Miles and Moina La Croix; that is all I dare wish for."

"And Rene Savorin?"

"I am that man's friend; he must not come to harm. But he is your friend, and they know it. He is also Crashaw's *protégé*."

"You talk of serving Miles and Moina La Croix," she says, slowly. "Do you not know that they are comparatively safe. It is to *their* interest to keep Miles La Croix as their nominal head. As for his beautiful daughter," here she fixes her dark eyes upon his face, "they are not likely to harm *her*, so long as there remains a hope, a chance, that she may be forced or terrified into marrying Rufus Crashaw."

"Good heavens!"

"It is Rene Savorin who is in danger—*present* danger."

"How? Why?"

"Because, innocently, and to protect herself, Moina La Croix has begged Savorin to stand between herself and Crashaw, in the character of an accepted suitor."

Swiftly the blood flows back from his face. He makes a sudden stride toward her.

"It is false!" he cries; "it is not true. Moina La Croix is—good heavens!" trying to speak more calmly. "Pardon me, and—and tell me what you mean."

She comes close beside him now, and lays a white hand upon his arm.

"At last we begin to know each other," she says, almost gently. "You must understand me. Moina La Croix is beautiful and good. She trusts Rene because she knows the secret of his unfortunate regard for my unworthy self. Her father has chosen to fancy them lovers, and has told Crashaw as much. Do you understand me now, when I say that Savorin is in danger? Crashaw sees in him a *rival*. Do you understand?"

"I do; and I see in this one more reason why we must act, and act promptly. Once again, will you aid me as I wish?"

"I will aid you. Will you trust this business to me?" She puts out her hand. "Here is my hand; give me two days' time, and let me act in my own way. I promise you that no more mischief shall be done."

"But—are you *sure?* are you strong enough?"

"Listen. I am telling you everything; my new authority did not come to me by post or express, but by the hand of an accredited mes-

senger—*Sharlaw's confidential agent, known* to those men *as such.* I shall call *him* to my aid; together we can hold their hands. Meantime, I shall make my report to Sharlaw. By the time his answer comes you will have rescued your friends the La Croix. Is not that best?"

"You promise me this?"

"This, and *more.* By all that you have done for *me;* by my faith as a woman; *by the memory of Basil Petrolowski I swear it!*"

CHAPTER LXXV.

A MAD ERRAND.

KEENLY alive as he had been from the first to all that concerned Moina La Croix, the knowledge that Rufus Crashaw sought her hand, and that he was in a position to urge his suit, worse yet, that it was in his power to annoy, even to intimidate her, was as gall to Roger Drexel. Now that his eyes were opened, he fancied that he could see more clearly the meaning of many looks and words that had puzzled him before. He blamed himself for what he termed his dulness, even while he remembered that never once had he seen Moina in Crashaw's presence; never heard her name upon his lips.

His eyes were open now to a new danger to Moina, and to Savorin; and he saw clearly, too, how this newly-discovered fact might, and probably would, complicate the case for him, render what he had to do yet more difficult.

"What you have told me concerning Rufus Crashaw and his designs makes instant action of some sort imperative," he says to the Princess, as they are about to part, after many things, all tending toward a better mutual understanding, have been said between them. "May I ask," he goes on; "you have seen so little of Miss La Croix, how you became aware of this?"

"I will tell you: from the first I was desired by the council to keep aloof from the La Croix. It was *policy*, they said, but, looking about for a stronger reason, it seemed to me that they wished to isolate this poor child, in order to make her more dependent upon one or the other. At first I could not determine which; then, as Rene Savorin, poor boy, began to manifest a preference for my society, and I saw how they allowed him to come under the influence, which they seemed to fear, for Miss La Croix. The reason became evident. I even received a hint that I was serving them by keeping Rene Savorin in bondage. If I had not, by that time, grown into a sincere liking for the boy, I should have closed my door to him after that. From the *first* Crashaw feared a rival there. But I fail to comprehend the man's motive in *this* affair. Rufus Crashaw is incapable of love."

"I am able to enlighten you there: Crashaw *loves* money; and two or three fortunes have slipped through his fingers. 'Crashaw, the great English ironmaster,' he calls himself here, when the truth is that the ironmaster and millionaire is his elder brother, and Rufus Crashaw stands accused of attempting to tamper with his life, in the hope of inheriting his wealth. His schemes were discovered, and he

was driven away in disgrace. While the millionaire brother, whose wealth is not entailed, protects his life by willing his money elsewhere, so long as he *lives* Rufus Crashaw receives one thousand pounds a year; when he dies the annuity ceases. Crashaw had drawn liberally from the Russian Government——"

"Ah! I——"

"And he is living now upon the funds drawn from the working-men here and abroad; but he foresees a time when this must cease, and Moina La Croix is an heiress in her own right."

"I see! All is clear now; and because I do, I say again—Rene Savorin must cease to play the rôle of lover to Moina La Croix. It is perilous."

"I know it. Rene Savorin shall be at once released; be sure of that."

"If harm should happen to Rene," she says, sadly, "I should have lost my last real friend."

Suddenly he comes closer and holds out his hand. But she shakes her head.

"Wait," she says. "Let me prove myself first; until then, think as well of me as you can—in *any* case, *trust me*."

And so they part, little guessing *how* they will meet again.

"I must see Moina," he says to himself, as he hastens to his rooms. "How shall I take her from among those wretches, and who can help me?" And then, in an instant, he says aloud, "Madeline Payne, of course!" And so he hurries on once more, to don the disguise of Captain Fernand, and in it to seek Moina.

"What will she say when she knows me as I am," he asks himself, and his heart answers, "Love cannot change, and *she loves me*."

And then he thinks of Madeline. Weeks have passed since they have met; but no week has gone by without the pre-arranged letter or message telling of his continued welfare and safety. The week is almost at an end; but this time he will not send a letter, so he assures himself. He will see her, and that soon; as soon as he has seen Moina. But it must be always Moina first henceforth.

But all thought of this flies before the new sensation which awaits him as he enters his room and at once pounces upon a letter which he finds lying just inside the threshold, pushed under the door by some deft hand.

It is addressed in Kenneth Hosmer's handwriting, and, wondering what Ken can have to say so soon, he tears off the envelope and reads—

"*One o'clock a.m.*

"DEAR GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER, AND FRIEND,

"It was utterly impossible for me to rest content after leaving you, my thoughts did so dwell upon that unfortunate comrade of mine who, for all I know, is being yet put to the question by yourself and Lord—I hope to heaven it isn't, and won't be, the police and judge as well. Deal gently with him, Roger, the man *has* been sadly victimized, and remorse has afflicted him sorely *I know*. But enough of poor Joseph. After I left you I threw off my disguise with a big grunt of thankfulness for the comfort of a set of well-fitting

clothes once again (I have actually spent three months and more in fustian), and, as it was yet early, I sallied forth, and, keeping your instructions in mind, sauntered around to the hotel where Savorin was quartered. He was there just as you had told me, and, still better, he was in his rooms at that moment. Better *still* for me, he was packing a small 'grip,' preparatory to leaving town. 'Attach yourself to him.' These were your instructions, and I *did*. This is how it came about. S—— was wondrous glad to see me, and promptly told me why. He was going to Chicago at an hour's notice upon business connected with the S. C. It was a trip under sealed orders. He was to be the bearer of certain packages, presumably of circulars and pamphlets for private circulation, and he was instructed to find a companion for the journey, the only stipulation that said companion must a 'brother.' I had no special wish to go to the city by the Lake of Blue, but when I heard his plaintive 'Do go, old fellow; I don't know many men, and I *must* have a fellow-pilgrim. If you refuse, I shall have to accept someone of their own selection (meaning the committee), and nobody knows whom they may inflict upon me.' Here was my chance. I 'attached' myself at once, and we go by a morning train. And now you know as much as I do concerning my flitting. Chicago, no disguise, *but* assumed names (mine is James Parrish), *sealed orders, a secret delivery*. Sounds interesting, doesn't it? We return, says Savorin, as soon as the business is done.

"Good-bye, old man, no use my trying to see you. I know how busy you are. Now good-bye again.

"Yours faithfully, "KEN."

"*James Parrish.*"

"Gracious heavens!" ejaculates Drexel, dropping the letter, and beginning a hasty metamorphosis. "I must know what this move means." When he is once more disguised, he consults a railway time-table which tells him that the first train for Chicago, a through mail, is probably leaving at that moment, and that another limited goes in a little less than two hours. "They can hardly have gone by the fast mail," he muses hopefully. "I can make the next, I think, and see Moina in the meantime."

And once more he sets out, and drives at a reckless pace toward the new shelter of the La Croix.

It can scarcely be called a house; shelter is the better word. It is a furnished suite this time, in the midst of a great apartment-house, and the location is by no means aristocratic. The suite is limited as to space, and Drexel knows that he must trust to fate or fortune for his opportunity to speak alone with Moina. Since the flight from B—— Street, Crashaw and Lugos are there almost constantly, singly sometimes, and sometimes together. As for Miles La Croix, since he no longer has either studio or study, he keeps his room much of the time, and even holds council with the others there.

"At the worst," he thinks as he rings at the door of the tiny vestibule, "I must trust to Minna."

It is Minna who admits him, and her first words cause his heart to bound.

"Oh, sir, how fortunate! Something has gone wrong, I am sure, for Miss La Croix is walking the floor and looking like death, and——"

"Who is here?" he breaks in sharply.

"No one but——"

He closes the door, brushes past her, and is in the little reception-room before Minna can complete her sentence.

"Where is she?"

The words are heard in the dining-room beyond. He hears a low cry, and then Moina springs through the open door, her hands outstretched.

"Oh," she cries, "heaven must have sent you." And, unmindful of Minna, he catches her in his arms, while she lets her pale face drop upon his breast, and bursts into tears, sobbing convulsively while yet striving bravely for self-control.

A moment later, when she lifts her tearful face, Minna is gone, and the door of the dining-room is discreetly closed.

"Moina, my dearest," he says, as he leads her to a seat, and places himself beside her, "something has happened, I know. But pray be calm; we may be interrupted at any moment."

"I know, I know. And everything depends upon *you*," she says, speaking swiftly, and rapidly regaining her self-command. "Listen," placing one eager trembling hand upon his arm. "You know how I learned so much about—everything? Well," as he nods assent, "last night they were here—Crashaw, Lugos, and Passauf, and they were closeted together for a longer time than usual, and I knew by the occasional sounds from papa's room that something more than common was being discussed. I was very uneasy for I feared some new evil, and *my* hands were tied. It was very late when they went away, but papa did not retire; instead, he came out into the dining-room, and walked and walked, muttering to himself from time to time. Papa has not been as well as usual for two or three days; he is more nervous and excitable than common. He eats nothing, and hardly sleeps, and has an increasing fever. Of course, I was anxious about him, but he would not let me approach him or do more than bring him now and then a cooling drink. His words, too, as I caught one now and then, were startling, but so disconnected that I could only make wild guesses at their meaning—or I *thought* them wild." She shudders, and for a moment buries her face in her hands.

"Moina," he cries impetuously, "you are being tried beyond your strength. This must end, and I mean to end it."

"Hush!" she says, putting out her hand; and then she hurries on, "He did not go to bed at all, and he only sat for a moment at a time. It seemed as if his strange excitement would not let him sleep or rest. He was even too preoccupied to notice that I, too, was up, and I was too anxious and terrified at I hardly knew what, to leave him for a moment. At daylight he was still awake, but very weary, as I could see. I had just coaxed him to take some coffee, and he was beginning to show signs of drowsiness when Rufus Crashaw arrived, and again

they conferred together for a long time. The man stayed until about an hour ago, and when he took leave of papa, who had followed him as far as the dining-room, I heard him say something about going in person to make sure that the men were safely on board, and with their luggage *properly stored*."

She checks herself, and listens for sounds from the rear room.

"I thought he was stirring," she says, "I must hasten on. It did not take much persuasion to induce papa to lie down and rest after Crashaw had gone. He looked ghastly, and was trembling with nervousness. I sat beside him, and put my hand upon his head, as I used to do, and in spite of his nervousness, he was soon asleep. Oh!" wringing her hands, "it is too horrible. *How* can I tell the rest?"

He takes the little, trembling hands in both his own.

"Tell me all, dearest; it is best," he whispers. And she goes on, with her hands still in his.

"When I was sure he was asleep, I closed the door softly, and then sat down beside him, and began to stroke his hands. I meant to try once more to make him talk as I did before, you know. But I had hardly touched him before he began. Oh, I can't tell it as he did. Sometimes I had to prompt him by questions. But this is what they are about to do. It seems that there has been a plot hatching for weeks, here, and in other cities, the whole country is to be terrorized. They are only waiting the signal. At first New York was to give the signal, but that has been changed, and now it is to be Chicago."

"Chicago!"

"Yes. Oh, it is *hideous!* It seems that two or three meetings—open-air meetings—have already been appointed in different parts of the city, and two or three men are to go from here now, *to-day*, in order to arrive in time. These men are *told* that what they are given to carry—the packages, you know—consists of books and circulars, to be distributed secretly among the initiated. These things are to be delivered to certain men who will await them; and they are *really* to contain—oh, it seems impossible—they will contain *infernal machines*, explosive bombs, such as have been used with such terrible effect in the Russian horrors, more deadly even than dynamite! and they are to be used to blow up and destroy the chief buildings, to throw the city in a panic, and the mobs will be *already gathered* to sack and rob, to attack the rich and splendid houses along the lakes."

"Great heavens!"

"Let me finish. To prevent other places from sending help, intimidation is to be used, and every city sending help is to be attacked at once in the same way, while several other cities are only awaiting the signal from Chicago to do as she does. It is horrible, and it was planned long ago, they have only waited to secure and safely store a sufficient quantity of the deadly explosives. They have all been prepared by two people, an old man and woman, foreigners."

"Oh! Did you hear the names?"

"No, only that the old man is sometimes called '*the Spider*.'"

In one instant Roger Drexel has clasped the girl in his arms and risen to his feet, drawing her up with him.

"Moina," he begins, speaking almost breathlessly, "my beloved

I believe God has ordained you an instrument in His hands to frustrate these fiends. I understand it all! And now listen. You have still another ordeal before you. Can you endure it? I know to-day, for the first time, of Rufus Crashaw's persecution of you, and knowing this, I must yet leave you alone, and in his hands, almost at his mercy."

"Oh! *where* are you going?"

"After those men. To Chicago, of course; to save hundreds of lives, perhaps, with heaven's help—and yours. Tell me, when did you last see Rene Savorin?"

"Not since early yesterday, and he promised to come to-day; I was looking for him when——"

"He will not come. Listen and be brave. They have sent Rene Savorin to meet his death in Chicago."

"Rene! Oh, why! why?"

"Because Crashaw believes him to be your lover."

"Ah, heaven!"

"And with him has gone *my* dearest friend. Gone, because *I* asked him to look after Rene Savorin. You see, I *must* go."

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"And a train, which they may take, leaves in less than one hour. Moina, it is a bitter thing to say, but your father's safety, and yours, rests with you now. If you can hold Crashaw off—if he can be made to believe that in time you will yield, he will give you time. It is the only way. Can you endure it a week? I will be back in less time if I am alive, if not, you shall be rescued, I swear it; others will take up my work where I lay it down. Moina, speak to me."

"Go!" she whispers, hoarsely, "go, save those people. I will endure it for your sake."

He snatches her in his arms once more. "You have Minna," he murmurs, "*trust her.*"

The moments are flying. He presses one burning kiss upon her pale lips, tenderly places her upon the couch, and goes without daring to look back, and while his feet go hastening down the dimly-lighted corridor, Moina La Croix, rising to her feet, totters half-way across the floor, reaches out her arms as if to clasp him and draw him back, and uttering an inarticulate moan, drops fainting upon the floor.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

DISSETT.

"THIS is a dangerous business," Roger Drexel had said to Madeline Payne months ago, when he brought her the cryptogram letter, addressed to Dr. Clarence Vaughan, and gave it into her care. "This is dangerous business, and it is but wisdom to take all possible precautions. So long as I am engaged upon it, I will see that you hear of me at stated intervals, regularly. If I go abroad, you shall have a letter or message every month at *least*, if I am still here, but absent, or for any reason, invisible for long, you shall hear of me *every week*. If there is anything to be said, anything which you ought to know,

you will receive my letter or messenger as the case may be. There are sometimes things, you know, which should not be committed to writing. When there is nothing to say, and I wish to signify to you that all is well with me, I will simply enclose to you a blank sheet. This will be safe, and can be managed when a letter could not be written. But if at any time you fail to receive due notice from me monthly if I am abroad, *every week* if at home, you will be at liberty to give this letter to Dr. Vaughan, and to tell him *everything*."

The satisfactory nature of the researches made by Messrs. Bologsy abroad, had rendered a journey to the Antipodes quite needless; but on the day which saw Roger Drexel rushing on board a west-bound express train at the very last moment, *en route* for Chicago, Madeline sat beside her dainty writing table, running over in her mind the events of the preceding weeks, glancing now and then at sundry letters and notes, and trying to guess what the complication could be which had delayed the coming of the usual weekly signal, which meant, when it meant no more—"*All's well.*"

For the past two weeks they *had* meant nothing more. The two last envelopes received by her, the first through the regular post and the last by a messenger, had contained only blanks, and this, in spite of the fact that the previous mission, dated three weeks back, had "something to say," and that of a nature to arouse expectations, not of these blank sheets before her, but of what? As she asks herself the question, she takes up the last written message, now three weeks old—

"Dear friend," it says, "while you seem to be comparatively out—of an occupation *I* am in the thick of it, and hope before many days to have brought things to a crisis, to be able to write, or better, *tell* you something worth while. Do not abandon the Princess; unless I am much mistaken in that lady she may yet turn to you for counsel and sympathy, and *she will need it.* As to Mr. Lord, he is quite safe for the present, I think. But upon no account must either yourself or Mrs. Ralston return to that shelter—yet. All is going well. Adieu. "R. D."

"Strange!" she murmurs, as she puts down the note, "clearly something has occurred—things have not gone as he anticipated."

At the coming of the first blank, one week after this animated note, she had been surprised and a little disappointed. The second had caused her some uneasiness, and now there was actual alarm growing stronger each moment as it passed, and not even a blank sheet was brought to her door. The seven days had elapsed, to be exact, on the previous evening, but it had happened more than once that the looked-for message had not reached her hands until the morning of the eighth day, especially if it came by the post.

But the morning was now past and it was with a troubled face that Madeline unlocked the little private drawer where the cryptogram had been safely treasured and laid it upon the table beside the other letters and papers. And now she realized that with her growing anxiety for Roger Drexel, was mingled a reluctance to summon Dr. Vaughan to

her aid, good and true and ready to do her service though she knew him to be.

But Madeline Payne was strong, and brave, and conscientious; and in the moment when she fully realized this feeling and its cause, she crushed it back, and taking up her pen dashed off a brief note in which she asked Dr. Clarence Vaughan to call upon her at the earliest possible moment, adding that what she wished to say to him was, perhaps, of vital importance, and concerned one who was the friend of both. This dispatched, she consulted her watch. It was three o'clock, and all unknown to her Roger Drexel's footsteps had passed her door less than six hours before.

Drexel had put off his usual message to Madeline until the eleventh hour, first because he wished it to follow his interview with Joseph Parker, so that he might be able to report this first great success, as he considered it. But upon second thought, he had changed his plan. He would first see the Princess, he promised himself, then snatch a few words, or at least, in case of any disturbing presence, a *look* from Moina, and *then* he would still have time to seek Madeline, for he had decided to go to her, and enlist her sympathy and help for Moina. He felt that he could talk better than write about Moina La Croix.

But the Princess had startled him by her revelation concerning Crashaw's suit and Savorin's false position. Then there had come the letter from Hosmer, causing him fresh anxiety, and last, Moina's hateful discovery at the very last moment, had driven everything out of his mind save the one thought of overtaking Savorin and Hosmer, and saving them and a whole city from disaster.

Having dispatched her letter, Madeline found herself thinking again, not of Drexel and his possible or probable misfortune, but of Clarence Vaughan, and her thoughts went back through the years to the time when he had first appeared before her, a very knight of chivalry, placing himself and his strength and protection at her service. She who was then a homeless fugitive, braving a danger she could not see, and casting aside his proffered aid, not knowing its worth or her own peril.

Then she thought of bonnie Claire Keith, who, like herself, had learned his worth through suffering; whom she had loved, and for whose sake she had crushed down a temptation and buried a sweet hope—bonnie Claire, who had been his wife for a little while, and then gone among her sister angels.

They had ever been friends, she and Clarence Vaughan, but from the day when with her own hand she had led Claire to the threshold beyond which she knew love waited, and shutting Claire in, shut herself out, out from home and love—yes, and even peace of mind, for many a long month—from that day to this one, she and Clarence Vaughan had never once met alone, and face to face, as they were soon to meet.

Suddenly she arose and rang for her maid.

"Change my dress, Rose," she said.

"What will it be?"

"The white English gown with the soft lace *lingerie*."

Oh, that English gown! Madeline was a woman, and she knew

that no fairer picture was ever seen by man than that which she made with her pale blonde loveliness and stately grace, set off by the simple elegance of that charming gown.

When all was done and she had scanned her image in the long mirror, she blushed rosily, and then sent a look of frank challenge, and these enigmatical words straight at the white-robed figure in the glass, "Why not, then? It is not *wrong*, it is not unwomanly."

And while the lovely hue still dyed her cheek, Rose entered and placed a card in her hand.

"Dr. Clarence Vaughan."

What an enigma is woman! In another moment Madeline was greeting him as frankly, as easily as if they had met in just this manner always. In the same manner was her business told, and then, without more loss of time, he was seated beside a low table, with Roger Drexel's cryptogram letter in his hands.

"Read it," she said, after her few words of explanation, "we can talk afterwards."

* * * * * *

Roger Drexel had scarcely turned his back upon her, and crossed the threshold of her outer door, when the Princess Sacha summoned her maid. Through all that trying ordeal she had borne herself gallantly, but now she was fairly quivering with excitement and resolutely pent up emotion.

"My street dress, the plain black one," she said imperiously, "and hasten. I may be gone two hours, excuse me to madam and tell her I thought it best not to disturb her."

Walking, swift walking, would have best suited her mood; action, movement of some sort, seemed a burning necessity, but the distance and her haste was too great. She could not reach her destination quick enough, so she took a carriage, questioning nothing save the speed of the horses, and was whirled on her way—a way she knew well now and had traversed before.

At the corner of two intersecting streets in the quarter where "nobody" lives, modest and quiet both, the carriage halted, and the Princess got down, bidding the driver wait, and walking briskly down a little court, to pause before a weather-beaten frame house bearing upon its street door the familiar sign in black lettering upon a big blue card, "FURNISHED ROOMS TO LET."

Here she rang and was admitted. "Is my uncle at home?" she asked of the woman at the door.

"Yes 'm. And I don't think he's as well as usual. He'll be very glad to see you, I reckon, and——"

But the Princess was already half-way up the stairs.

"I am in haste," she said over her shoulder, and in another moment was standing within a large "front room," shabby yet comfortable, and evidently the constant abiding-place of a man who was accustomed to a bachelor existence.

"Madam!" ejaculates the man, who hastens forward to receive her; "Madam, is it you?" He is of small stature, and has an habitual stoop of the shoulders His clothes are shabby, but scrupu-

lously clean, and while his face is almost expressionless, and his complexion like parchment, his hair is carefully brushed, and his short beard neatly trimmed.

"Yes, Dissett, it is I ; close your door and arrange your screen, I have something important to speak of."

She has given him her hand as she speaks, and he knows that it is unsteady, and notes her voice quivering with suppressed excitement. Noislessly he goes about doing her bidding, and then proffers her his easiest chair, but she waves it away.

"Don't ask me to *sit*—not now," she says, "and don't question me yet—just *answer*."

He bows silently, and stands expectant.

"Dissett," she begins, "you know that I have trusted you, and with good reason. I suppose, too, that I know you better, know *more* of you than many—than most ; but to-night I wish to know yet more."

"Ask, madam," he bows submissively.

"First, and least in importance, yet essential, explain to me this. When you came across the ocean in the same vessel with myself, though disguised, and keeping aloof like a stranger, you told me, upon making yourself known, that you had come to serve Sharlaw *and* the cause, and intimated that, at that time, you were not at liberty to say more. You remember?"

"I remember, perfectly."

"When you came to me *later*, and presented that letter from Sharlaw, in which he bade me make such use of you as I might, could, or would, I was, as you may remember, inclined to look upon you a little as having been sent to keep up an espionage over *me*, and this suspicion brought out your statement that you had been sent at *your own request*, and that, while you were sincere in your belief that you could be of use by giving information, based upon your point of view, which would supplement such observations as *I* could make from mine, you had still *another object*. Do you remember what you said then?"

"Do you wish me to repeat it, Madam La Princess?"

"Yes."

"I told you that, while I believed in your patriotism, your loyalty to the *cause*, and *knew* that its interests were safe in your hands, here and elsewhere, I also believed that you had a double motive in coming to this country. Do you wish me to go on?"

"I will finish. You told me that I was the friend of Basil Petrolowski and his mother, and that you knew that the lady whom I addressed as *mother*, *was* Madam Petrolowski ; that you believed me to be engaged in an effort to learn the truth concerning his fate, and that, because you had known both his father and his mother, you would be glad if you could aid me in this. And *then* we came to a better understanding, and became allies—you, because you had loved the mother, I, because I had loved the son. But there was something else. You said that you hoped to find, here in America, a man who had once done you a deadly personal wrong ; and you owned *that* to be the first object of *your* life, as to find Basil was the first object of *mine*."

"True—all true."

"This last was a personal matter, and we did not go into it, though it seems to me *now* that you spoke the name of this enemy. Have you found that man, Dissett?"

"Not yet."

"Nor any trace of him?"

"A trace, yes. I have learned that he was, or is, in some way connected with one of the circles, and he has disappeared so completely that I imagine he must have taken some other name over here. The one by which *I* knew of him had become infamous."

"You knew of him? Did you not *know* him, then?"

"I never saw him."

"Dissett, tell me his name."

"His name? The name by which I have traced him is *Croizon.* Madam—*madam!* What is it? Good heavens, *what is it?* Do you *know* this man?"

The impassible Dissett is electrified, is a new being, quite as eager, almost as tremulous, as she, and now the look which she turns upon him is a strange mingling of eagerness and triumph, and fierce anger.

"Dissett," she cries, "tell me? *I must know.* How has this man wronged you?"

But suddenly he recoils from her, a crafty look in his eyes. "But wait," he breaks in, "do you know him? is he, perchance, a friend, whom you would warn?"

"A *friend!* Ah, heavens!"

The words and the look are answer enough.

"Tell me," she says, insistently.

"How? I *will* tell you. This man, this Croizon, found my brother, my only brother, little more than a boy, among the free command at Kara. He, my brother, had been betrayed, and had already served out five years, in two more he was to be released by a special arrangement. The Government had found reason to doubt his guilt. Croizon sought him out, obtained letters—poor Serge had a sweetheart in Warsaw—and turned them over to the Government, *betrayed him*, and, worse—you know the penalty. Serge died in the mines, died horribly."

He breaks off suddenly. What a strange look upon a woman's face. Not sympathy, but increased and triumphant hatred.

"Tell me," she fairly hisses, as she clutches at his arm, "if you find this man, what—how can the law punish him, *here?*"

"The *law!*" and now the man's face is fearful to see. "Let me once find him," stretching out two clutching talon-like hands, "and here is *the law* that shall avenge Serge Ivanovitch."

She comes close, closer, the two hate-distorted faces are near together, eyes meeting eyes.

"And if I could tell you——"

"Tell me, and ask of me ANYTHING."

And now she falls back a pace, and by a strong effort forces her tongue to steadiness.

"I am here for that," she cries. "Croizon the spy, Croizon the assassin, *is* known to you as——"

"*Rufus Crashaw.*"

"Rufus Crashaw?"

"The same."

"Just heaven!"

"And the destroyers of Basil Petrolowski, those who are within our reach, are Crashaw, Lugos——"

"Ah! that man?"

"And Passauf."

There is a long moment of silence, then Dissett asks, quite calmly, for this strange man, now that the worst is known, has suddenly regained his stolid calm.

"You said, 'those within our reach;' are there others?"

"Yes; but Prince Vladimir Orloff has passed beyond *our* judgment and beyond the law. There must be tools, too, in Paris, and at Petersburg; but I fear they will not be easily traced. It was Croizon who followed Basil to this country, after they had bound him by a deadly oath in Paris. Sit down."

"No. First give me some wine, I feel strangely unnerved, then I will tell you what I know."

And she did, omitting nothing.

"You see," she said at the last, "I am bound to this Hurst, this detective. How well he has served us both; but for him you might never have learned that Croizon and Crashaw are one, and I might never have known how Basil died." And now for the first time there are tears in this woman's eyes. "Ah, pitying heaven! And to think that he heard his last words, that he pressed his hand at the last. You must see him, Dissett."

"I! Yes—no. I think my brain is turned. Yes, he has done us royal service; we owe him much. Tell me again, what does he require?"

"That I use my power to keep those wretches from other murders which, he believes, are already planned, to force them to abandon everything and leave the country."

"But—this is so strange. He has everything in his hands. Why could he not denounce them to the authorities?"

"Because he is as anxious to save and shield Miles La Croix and his beautiful daughter as he is to punish the others."

"I see. One moment, let me think." For some moments both are silent, then, "do you agree with this detective?"

"In what?"

"Do you favour quiet, private measures?"

"Listen," she says, her tone softening, "I have told you that Madam Petrolowski is failing, but you can never guess how fast. Once my hope was to add to her interest in life, to lengthen her days, perhaps, by bringing her sometime good tidings of Basil. *Now*, my one wish is to keep everything from her until the end." The man sighs heavily, and his head sinks upon his breast. "She is sinking slowly and painlessly," she goes on. "At first she was full of hope, but lately, as her hold upon life grows feebler, she seems to have

been given 'the clear vision'—she sees the truth. But not in its horror, only the vision of Basil translated and awaiting her. She is strangely tranquil." All this has been uttered in short, broken phrases, as if their utterance were painful or difficult; and now she clutches at her breast, as if the heart within could be held in check. "She must not know—she *must not*. It would be another murder. Yes, there must be no publicity, else all might become known to *her*. I look for help from you, Dissett."

"Ah!" These are evidently the words he has wished to hear. "Trust me. Is there a limit to the time within which we must act?"

"It must be soon. Three persons who are in their power are in hourly danger."

"What did you tell the detective?"

"I guaranteed the safety of all concerned, and asked him to trust all to me. He seemed glad and willing to do so. I think his hands are over-full."

He is upon his feet and standing before her.

"Will *you* trust them to *me?*" he asks. "I think I know how to deal with them, but I must have time to think. You shall be informed; you shall understand. I may even require your help. Give me one day." Their eyes meet for just an instant, then fall apart quickly. "Trust me," he urges; "*they shall do no further harm.*"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

WHAT MINNA KNEW.

"WHAT should be our first move?" It was Dr. Vaughan who asked the question, looking into Madeline's face as if he could find a certain enjoyment in anything which gave him such opportunity, grave though the occasion was.

She had told him the story of Roger Drexel's efforts and her own share in them, beginning with the evening of the explosion in Elias Lord's vestibule, and stopping when she had narrated the incident of her call at the house on B—— Street, when she had gone at the request of Madam La Princess to see Moina, and at Drexel's request, in order to judge if Miles La Croix was the man she had known on ship-board.

All this she had set before him clearly and concisely, but she had not mentioned the name of Captain Fernand Makofski. Now, however, in answer to his question, "What shall be our first move?" she said,

"I think we ought to drive to B—— Street at once. I say *we*, because I, being an acquaintance, would be likely to obtain admission."

"But that, as I understand, is the place where the La Croix live."

"Yes."

"And you think we should hear of Roger there?"

"I think we might hear of, if we do not see, Captain Fernand Makofski."

"And who is Captain Fernand Makofski?"

"But for this emergency and his own explicit directions, I should not be justified in mentioning a discovery which Mr. Drexel may or may not have expected me to make. Upon the occasion of the visit of which I have told you, I encountered a gentleman. He was opening the door for the Princess, and I saw him distinctly. On the way home I learned from the Princess that this was the 'compatriot' she had called to see, and that he was known as Captain Fernand Makofski; but, disguised as he was, I could not mistake his voice, his carriage, nor the *hand* which I saw distinctly—it was Roger Drexel."

"And do you know any motive for such a disguise?"

"Yes. He had learned something which led him to think that headquarters of the conspirators was in B—— Street."

"And you think he became an inmate of that house?"

"I am sure of it."

Vaughan looked grave.

"That looks serious," he said. "In that house he might be in hourly danger of discovery."

"True."

"Of course. Then we must look for him there."

She arose instantly. "Let us go at once," she said. "It is past the dinner hour already, but we must not delay."

"It is the very hour for finding everybody at home. I am at your service. Command me."

On the way to B—— Street, Madeline uttered a sudden exclamation.

"We are beginning wrong," she said. "Being disguised, Mr. Drexel may not desire to see anyone. We may be refused admittance at the door. Let us try a ruse. Let us leave a note at the door for him. Anything will do."

They told the coachman to stop at the nearest stationer's, and Dr. Vaughan alighted and wrote a few words at the counter, enclosing them in an envelope and hastening with it back to the carriage.

"We will drive to the corner nearest the house," he said, "and there I will procure a messenger. There is always a boy to be found."

But there was no boy at the corner, and he walked on in the direction of the house. As he arrived within sight of the street door, he came upon a boy, who, with his hands deep in his pockets, was leaning in a lazy attitude against a brick wall, and whistling a languid strain. Vaughan stopped and accosted him.

"What are you doing here, boy?"

"Nothin'—but waitin'," replied the gamin, with a good-humoured grin upon his face. It was not a dull face, and after a few words of parley and instruction, its owner was mounting the steps of the abandoned B—— Street house, while Dr. Vaughan turned and went slowly back toward the carriage; where a moment later, the boy rejoined him, with the letter still in his hand.

"It ain't no use, sir," he said, giving the letter back into the doctor's hands; "he ain't there an' he *ain't* been, the girl says, since last night."

The boy was close beside the carriage when he spoke, and as Madeline leaned forward to catch his words, he favoured her with a long stare, which she was too preoccupied to notice. The doctor hastened to fee him with a liberal hand, and to dismiss him promptly.

"What shall we do now?" he asked, with his face at the carriage door.

"You must let *me* try," Madeline replied. "If Moina is at home, I may learn something. Suppose I leave *you* in the carriage while I make my call."

He waited half-an-hour in front of the gloomy house, from which no light, save that from the vestibule, shone out. At the end of that time she rejoined him, entered the carriage in silence, and said,

"Tell him to drive—anywhere." Then, as the carriage rolled away, she turned quickly toward him.

"If Mr. Drexel had not stipulated that we were *not* to call upon the police, except as a last resort, I should say, drive to police headquarters at once."

"Ah! you have not succeeded?"

"Worse. I found only servants in the house; luckily Miss La Croix's old servant, who came with her from Liverpool, opened the door to me. She knew me, and was willing to talk. Captain Makofski, she knew him by no other name, left the house last night, without leaving any word or message, and without a word to indicate an intended absence."

"Did she see him go?"

"Yes; and she says that he came downstairs, bringing a large travelling bag, which a boy carried off, while he still stood in the doorway. 'It was the boy from the laundry,' the captain said—I am repeating her words."

"Ah! but that is something. He may have intended to leave."

"I have not told you all. The La Croix, father and daughter, left this house more than a week ago. They dismissed the other two servants, and kept Margot, on condition that she remain in this house until they should return, or send for her. They bade her secure a young girl to be a companion for her, and an old man, a porter from a little café where Margot bought the family supplies, sleeps in the house at nights. The girl said that she wept when her young mistress bade her good-bye, and that Moina assured her, with tears in her own eyes, that this separation *was necessary*, was unavoidable, but that she should surely be with her again. The poor girl is living upon this promise. She believes implicitly in her young mistress, and so, I must declare, do I."

"Did this girl Margot know their destination?"

"No; and she further told me that their departure was very strange: the manner of it. She has grown very anxious and uneasy at the prolonged absence of 'that kind captain,' as she calls Mr. Drexel. She seems to like *him* quite as much as she dislikes another personage who seems to have been often here."

"And he?"

"Is the Rufus Crashaw, who, if Mr. Drexel is not mistaken, is one of the chief conspirators."

"Ah—ah!"

"You have some idea?"

"Yes; but pray, go on."

"About their going? They went after dark, taking almost nothing with them. First went Moina with Minna."

"With Minna?"

"My maid—of whom I told you; and later went Mr. La Croix in company with Mr. Crashaw. Margot only knows that her mistress is 'somewhere in the city.' It seems that Minna has twice visited the house, and each time has taken away something belonging to Moina. If she would only come again? If she would communicate with me; but you see I placed her at Mr. Drexel's disposal, and she is responsible only to him."

"Is it not probable that Drexel has gone to join the La Croix?"

"All the same," said Madeline, sighing heavily. "He has not given me the usual sign. There *must* be something wrong."

"I fear so."

"I am going back there to-morrow, early," she added; "I shall stay until I learn something. Ah! what is the matter?"

The coachman had checked his horses suddenly, just where the light from above streamed down, lighting all about them, and, before the wheels had ceased to revolve, he had leaped to the ground, tightening his grasp upon his whip. At the same instant a lithe form sprang from behind the carriage and dashed across the way, losing itself in a moment among the crowding vehicles.

Dr. Vaughan, who had thrust his head out of the window on the side opposite the coachman, caught a fleeting glimpse of a small figure, and a grimy face in a battered cap. "What is it?" he called, to the coachman.

"Someone's been following us, sir. He caught on behind. He's followed clear from B—— Street, I think. I've been waiting for a chance to catch him in a good light spot, and now——"

"And now he has got away," said the doctor, lightly. "Drive on, if you please. It was only some street arab; I saw him run."

But when they were once more on the way he said to Madeline,

"I shall go straight back to B—— Street. That boy who ran away was the boy who carried my note to the door. I can only explain his interest in us in one way."

"And that."

"That his presence so near that door was not accidental. If he had been stationed there to report upon those who might call, it would account for his interest in *us*."

"You are right," said Madeline, with sudden decision; "stop the carriage."

"For what?"

"We have just passed a cab-stand. You must not waste your time in doing useless escort duty. Go back at once and take a cab, I

am safe and near home. Go, and come or send for me at any hour, however late or early. Don't waste words, I feel as if something would come of this."

In her earnestness, she had put her firm gloved-hand upon his arm, and he took it and held it fast for a moment.

"As you will," he said, and called to the coachman to stop.

"Be careful for yourself," she murmured, as he stepped from the carriage; "if I do not hear from you in the meantime, or am not otherwise instructed, I shall come to B—— Street in the morning."

Dr. Vaughan was not a detective, and he had never engaged in an adventure like this of the present.

But he was a man of resources; quick to think and to act. He did not go back to B—— Street by the route he had taken first, nor did he leave his carriage at the nearest corner. He alighted instead two full blocks away, and approached the house from a new direction.

As yet the doctor had but one clearly-defined plan, and this concerned the boy, who had followed their carriage, and was, he felt sure, the one whom he had sent to the door of the B—— Street house.

He had intrusted that note to him, and looked for a truthful report of the result of this inquiry, believing him to have been lounging there accidentally. Now he no longer believed that the boy was in that precise spot, so near the door of the house, and yet in a position where he was quite out of sight of the inmates—by accident; and, if he was there as a spy, whose interest did he serve? It was an answer to this question which the doctor was seeking. But, first, he must satisfy himself that the boy *was* a spy, and to do this, he must wait for his return, if he did return. If the lad mounted guard again, he thought he should know what course to pursue.

He walked past the house, and then crossed the street, resuming his *surveillance* from the opposite side, for he guessed that the boy, if he returned, would go straight to the house, or as near as possible, in order to satisfy himself as best he could, that there had been no changes, no arrivals or departures during his absence.

A full quarter of an hour had passed, the doctor pacing slowly up and down, when, just as he came nearly opposite the house where all his interest centered, a cab came rolling up and halted squarely before the door, and, before the driver was able to scramble down and assist his passenger, almost before the wheels had ceased to revolve, some one sprang out, and Vaughan could see as she ascended the steps, that it was a woman.

The new arrival was kept waiting at the door, as Madeline had been, while Margot made her way up from the kitchen; and Vaughan strode straight across the street, bent upon seeing this evening visitor before the door closed behind her. But it was not to be. As his foot touched the pavement, the door opened and quickly closed again, shutting the visitor within.

Baffled thus, an inspiration seized him. In a moment, doubtless, Margot would have conducted her visitor to some remote apartment. Madeline herself had been so conducted to a small room in the rear, she had told him; and Margot had explained that she kept the living-

rooms locked, by order of the master. He must see this woman's face, then, before she left the upper hall. In three bounds he was at the door, and ringing a furious peal.

This time the door was opened very promptly, and then, as he stepped quickly within the vestibule, he saw that only this was open, and Margot stood beside the closed inner door, alone, and barring the way.

"Good evening, Margot," he said, with the frank smile, which won him friends so readily; "I hope I did not startle you. I am a friend of Miss Payne, and she has sent me here; will you not let me come in a few moments?" and then, remembering that he had in his pocket one of Madeline's visiting-cards—taken, by the way, surreptitiously from Olive Girard's card-tray—he hastened to produce and present it, together with one of his own.

His smile, Madeline's name, and the cards combined, were sufficient to overcome Margot's wariness. She unlocked the inner door, and he saw, standing within in an attitude of waiting, the woman who had entered before him.

While Margot closed and locked the door, the doctor advanced, and, standing directly under the rays of the single light burning overhead, removed his hat with a courtly gesture.

As he did so, the strange woman took a sudden step forward, halted, looked again, and exclaimed,

"Dr. Vaughan! Oh, how thankful I am!" and then in answer to his look of inquiry, and with sudden self-repression, "you do not know me, sir. But I have seen you——" and then coming closer and lowering her voice to a whisper, "I am Minna, formerly Miss Payne's maid."

"Minna! Then this is a fortunate meeting. Miss Payne is very anxious to hear of Miss La Croix."

"What—is she not here, then?"

"No," cried Margot, letting the jealousy she had harboured against Minna burst forth, unnerved as she was by anxiety and weariness. "She is *not* here! Is *this*, then, the way you look after my dear mistress? Where is she?—wretch!" and she bursts into tears.

Minna looks at her without a trace of resentment.

"Poor girl," she says, soothingly, "it has been hard for her," and then puts her hand upon Margot's arm.

"Margot," she says, "we must be calm. It may all come right. Where is Captain Fernand? I must see him."

And now the doctor interposes.

"Minna," he says, "I fear something serious has happened. I know from Miss Payne and from Captain Fernand, just what your position is. Later, I will tell you more, just now, tell us what you mean. You left here less than two weeks ago in attendance upon Miss La Croix. Have you been separated since?"

"If you know all that," Minna says, quickly, "you *know* that I was bidden to be ever watchful of the young lady, and so I *have* been. To-night I was sent out upon a shopping errand; I was given a list of things to be got for the house, and they were things that were much needed, some of them being for the especial comfort of M. La

Croix, who is really ill. It was M. Lugos who first instructed me to go; but he consulted Miss Moina, and she told me to do anything that would add to her father's comfort. So I went, and the commissions were so various, that I was obliged to be absent almost two hours. When I came back—all were gone."

"All?"

"All—and I found this note," she placed a scrap of writing in his hand, which ran thus,

"Mr. La Croix and daughter have been called away so suddenly that it was out of the question to wait for your return. You will remain at your post until you hear from them further, which will not be for some days. Enclosed find money sufficient for present needs." This missive began without address and ended without signature.

"There was a bank note within," said Minna, as she received the note back from his hands.

"And what do you think of this, Minna?"

"Simply that they got me out of the way in order to have Miss Moina and her father more fully in their power." Again she turns toward Margot. "Captain Makofski," she begins.

"Oh!" cries the now frightened girl. "What does it all means? *He*, too, is gone?"

"Gone!" cries Minna; and then Dr. Vaughan, interposing, tells her how Captain Makofski left the night before, and that he has not been seen since.

"We hoped," he concludes, "that he had gone to join Mr. La Croix."

Suddenly Minna starts forward.

"I must go back," she says. "They may come back—some of them; nothing has been taken away. That is my place. I must go back." And she turns her head and, unseen by poor Margot, flings to the doctor a meaning glance.

Then the doctor turns to Margot, and speaks a few soothing words. She must not be too anxious, and must keep up her courage. In the morning Miss Payne will come to see her again, and if things have gone wrong, they will all try to set them right.

But it was Minna who spoke the comforting word.

"Miss La Croix has not given you up," she said, kindly. "This change is only for a little while. I have heard her say so; and she is much attached to *you*, Margot. Stay here, and be patient; then she will know where to find you. And now I must go."

"And I also," said Dr. Vaughan, "since we can do nothing here."

And so, in a moment, Margot was alone again with her own thoughts, for her young companion was asleep in the kitchen corner, and their aged guardian of the night had not yet appeared. But it was a full hour before the poor bewildered, anxious girl waked the little sleeper in the chimney seat by exclaiming—

"Oh—*oh!* And he *came* and *went*, that nice Dr. Vaughan, and *never told what he came for*, after all."

* * * * * *

As the vestibule door closed upon them, Minna turned to Dr. Vaughan, and said—

"I wish to speak with you. Will you ride back with me?"

"It is what I wish to do," he said.

Without further words they entered the cab, and as soon as the wheels were fairly in motion, Minna began.

"I do not fear to trust *you*, Dr. Vaughan, for while you could not be expected to remember me, I have seen you, and heard of you often, and I know that Miss Payne trusts you fully." The darkness kindly hid the wave of colour which slowly mounted to the doctor's brow. "But I dared not say what I wished to say," went on Minna, all unconscious of the effect of her last words, "in Margot's presence, because I do not know how far to trust her. I have been put in her place, and told that I was to stand a friend to my young mistress. I am acting for Mr. Drexel and for Miss Payne, and I think, I hope—it is right to tell you everything."

"Listen," he interposed; and then, in the fewest words possible, and without going into details, he told her how Madeline had sent for him, and of Drexel's letter.

"Now," said she, "I am *sure!* I must tell you everything." And beginning with the night when they left the house on B—— Street, she told how, in company with Rene Savorin, her new mistress and herself, had taken rooms for the night; and how, after a time, Moina, becoming uneasy, they had slipped away and gone back to B—— Street, where they expected to find Margot.

"We were back in B—— Street early," she said. "We had not been away three hours. My mistress had taken away the latch-key which her father had used, putting it in her little dressing-bag with other keys, and we let ourselves in with this. There was no one in the house, not a soul; and most of the rooms were closed and locked, Miss Moina's own among the rest. We were going about on the second floor, trying to open some of the doors, when, just as I had found that M. La Croix's room was not locked, we heard someone enter below, and my mistress had the courage to go to the stair-rail and look down. It was quite dark where we were, except for the small hand-lamp which I carried; but it was light below, and she saw M. Crashaw and two or three strange men entering. In an instant she was within her father's room, pushing me on before her, and blowing out the lamp. We closed and locked the door softly, and then we stayed in the darkness, I can't tell how long, until—— Ah, sir! how can I tell you what happened then?"

But she did tell it, and so well that Clarence Vaughan sat beside her almost holding his breath as she pictured to him that dramatic scene. Almost he could see the man who had chosen to call himself Fernand Makofski, entrapped and alone, being secretly tried for his life; and the two horror-stricken girls pressing closer, and yet closer, against that curtained door of communication, and trembling while they listened.

Almost word for word she told the story, until she had arrived at the point where Drexel, drawing his weapons, had put himself on the defensive, and there she stopped.

"Always I have said and believed that my mistress—Miss Payne, I mean—was in all things the best, the wisest, the *bravest;* that *no*

one could compare with her—no one," said Minna, with emotion. "Ah! it does not often fall to one poor girl to serve *two* like that! Listen! One moment Miss Moina had been clinging to my arm and quivering—ah, until I thought she would surely faint, and we be caught, and maybe, killed, too. The *next* I knew through the dark that she had left my side, and I heard a slight—oh, *ever* so slight a sound near the outer door. Then she was back again. 'Stand back,' she whispered in my ear; and then, just as the voices in the next room were lifted high, I knew by the sound that she was slipping back a bolt and opening that door as she had the other. Then she drew me toward the outer door. 'You *must* be brave,' she whispered, and her voice was almost a hiss in my ears, and her hand shut upon my arm like pincers. 'Go downstairs—there is nobody there—open the outside door, and stand there ready, the moment you hear a a scream or a shot, to run out and call for help. *Call loud*, but *wait* for the signal.' What happened next I don't quite know, all of it. But I must explain to you here that when I went to take the place I carried an ear trumpet, and have carried it ever since. *She* knew that I was not deaf, but not the others. *That* is how I heard a little from Crashaw and the others before they left the house. Miss La Croix confronted those men, and declared that *she*, and not Captain Fernand, had revealed their horrible plots; and in some way they made a compromise, and they went away and left us there under the care of 'Captain Fernand.' The next day, early, we went to the new place, where we are going now, and where we have been ever since. We went before Margot came back, and the only thing that Miss Moina was obstinate about, when M. Lugos came next day, was the keeping of Margot. She would have Margot back, or they should permit her to remain in B—— Street, until 'better times come'—those were her words, 'until better times come.'"

"Do you understand why they permitted *you* to stay?"

"Yes; I knew how to appear stolid and indifferent. They thought me deaf, and that I was a stranger—found, so they thought, at the intelligence office. Margot, they knew, was devoted to her mistress. They *knew* she was bound. They thought they could bribe *me*, and they *did*."

"Ah! They did?"

"Yes; how else could I serve Miss Moina? And after that night I was ready to go any length to serve her. Since that time neither Miss La Croix nor her father have stepped outside their own rooms until last evening, and Lugos, or Crashaw, or *both*, have been there almost constantly."

"May they not have made their escape from these schemers?"

"No. *She* was upon her honour; and, besides, they—those men, were both there when I left the place. But, wait, you wish to hear of Captain Makofski—Mr. Drexel. He was in our rooms this morning. Oh, *something* has gone wrong! Last night, Crashaw and Lugos were there, shut up with that sick old man all night, and had not been gone long when *he* came—Mr. Drexel—*she* only knew him as Makofski; she was in a terrible state of agitation from some cause when he came. She had just come from her father's room—I thought he

was sleeping—and she flew to Mr. Drexel, looking almost as wild as her father looks at times. They talked for a little time very hurriedly, and as if the subject were something serious. Then he went away in great haste, and, as he went, I heard a fall, and found Miss Moina lying upon the floor in a dead faint. After that, father and daughter both kept their rooms until this evening, and now——"

The carriage stopped suddenly. "Let us get out here," she said, "the house is only a block away."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

PREPARING FOR THE FRAY.

It was the morning following the singular interview between the Princess and Dissett, and M. Lugos and his henchman Passauf had just parted, after a long, and by no means satisfactory, consultation.

"When I trust to my own instincts," Lugos said, half aloud, "I am never betrayed by them." It would never have occurred to this man to utter such a sentiment for the benefit of another, but he said it to *himself* quite as a matter of course; and as he spoke it was of Captain Makofski he was thinking, for the disappearance of the captain had disturbed him quite as much as it had Madeline or Moina, but for a different reason.

If affairs had happened as they ought, he would know quite well where to look for Captain Fernand, and he could breathe easily at this moment, knowing that he had no more to fear from that disturbing personage. But yesterday morning had come and passed, and there had been no stark and beaten dead man found in the little B—— Street park.

That the attack had been carefully planned he knew. He knew, too, that the victim had gone, of his own accord, to the place which was to have been the scene of his execution. He knew that the appointed assassins were ready, and upon the ground; and he also knew—now—that the plot had failed.

The two assistants, who had loitered outside the park gate, ready to join in the attack at a given signal, had ruefully reported their failure, telling how, at the very moment of attack, they had been seized "by half-a-dozen policemen," and imprisoned, only to be turned loose in the morning as the victims of mistaken identity. But where were Joseph Parker and his "partner"? *where* was Captain Fernand? A visit to B—— Street resulted in nothing. Clearly, Captain Fernand had set out for the park at the proper time; clearly, too, he, as well as Parker and "the young mechanic," had entered there duly, according to programme. Where were they?

From the first M. Lugos had recognized in Captain Fernand a dangerous force, had foreseen all the difficulties likely to be conjured up by the entrance of this strong spirit into the circle which, until his advent, had been a machine to be worked at his will, for it *was* his will which dominated even Crashaw and Passauf.

True, these two were registered as next in authority to Miles La

Croix; but, even as this erratic visionary was overruled by his more plausible subordinates, so *they*, in turn, soon found themselves looking to him as a leader. And M. Lugos *was* this, or nothing.

Even if there had been nothing to conceal, a man of Lugos's temperament could not have borne to recognize his equal in force of character, in astuteness; or to have his authority lessened, disputed, or perhaps, even divided by such an one as, he knew instinctively, was now among them. Having *everything* to conceal, he became, from the first, a deadly enemy. And Crashaw and Passauf, who, sharing his risk, shared also, his hatred.

That Makofski and Joseph Parker, the condemned and his executioner, had both disappeared, and at the same time, from the same place, was cause enough for uneasiness; but this was not all: Passauf had just furnished him with a second cause, not connected, or so he thought, with the first.

"There is something else that troubles me," Passauf had said, when they had ceased to discuss the disappearance. "I met Dissett, Sharlaw's confidential scribe, this morning. He seemed in great haste, and I could not get him to say anything, except that he meant to see me again, and to ask about Crashaw, *and you*."

"After—me? I don't know him."

"Well, he knows *you*. He's a deep one; said he had just landed in New York. I wish I knew what brought him here."

"You seem to know him well."

"I do—or did. I knew him—years ago—in Russia."

"Were you friends *there*?"

"At one time," growled Passauf, "we were fellow-prisoners." And as this had been a long conversation for this taciturn man, he brought it to an abrupt close by reminding Lugos that he was expected in another quarter of the city in half-an-hour.

"True," assented Lugos, and then he added; "tell your patient, or mine, that he must make haste and get into his new quarters. The old woman should not be so long left alone."

No mention had been made of Crashaw, and none was necessary. Both knew quite well that the "opportunity," which Lugos had predicted for him, not long before, had come; and that he was now engaged in furthering, or seeking to further, his own interests.

Left alone again, this man of many resources sat down and pondered the situation. And out of his fertile brain was soon evolved a course of action.

"I'll go to the Princess," he said; "I'll take the initiative—the *aggressive*, if need be." And then into his mind came a vision of their last meeting, and the terms upon which they had parted.

From the first there had been distrust between these two. She, upon learning of his activity in the circle, had doubted his motive, and openly expressed her doubt; and he, knowing her influence "at court" with the "master" and his constituents, had chosen to doubt her loyalty, and had set afloat those whispers concerning her, which Drexel had so cunningly seized and used in order to give to his first appearance under Miles La Croix's roof a stronger air of reasonableness.

This had not been done, however, until he had assured himself by a most humiliating test—that to be one of the "superiors" was *not*, in the estimation of Princess Sacha, an open sesame to her smiles and social favours.

And yet, in spite of all these things, M. Lugos had determined to face the Princess in her stronghold once more.

* * * * * *

When Dr. Vaughan arrived with Minna at the lately-abandoned rooms of La Croix, it was with a faint hope that he might find within some clue to their strange flitting. But no card, no address, no scrap of paper upon the laden and littered table in Miles La Croix's bed-room, could be converted, by the strongest imagination, into a clue, or a hint, upon which to act.

"They went hastily, that is evident," he said, "and unexpectedly, I am sure. See; he had begun an article, an address I should think, and left even his unfinished page and his scattering notes here. Is anything gone from the bookcase or desk, Minna?"

And then, for the first time, she noted that half-a-dozen books—she described them as "long, thin books," were missing from behind the glass door of the little corner bookcase.

"Records!" murmured the doctor to himself. And this was their only discovery.

"I shall stay here," said Minna, in answer to a question; "at least, until I hear, either from Miss La Croix, Miss Payne, or Mr. Drexel. I consider myself accountable first of all, to *him*. Someone will be sure to come back here; and here I stay."

"She is right," said Madeline, when Minna's decision was made known to her, "only—she must have a companion."

When the doctor left Minna it was to go back to Margot, of whom he begged a night's shelter; and, much to her surprise, instead of a bed-room, he chose the studio, with its two windows overlooking the street, and instead of a bed, an easy-chair placed directly before one of these windows. More than this, he beguiled her into intrusting the street-door key to his care.

"If that boy *is* watching this place," he said to himself, "he will show himself soon; he *can't* watch here all night. Perhaps he has an alternate; and if *that* is the case, I may see them both."

His vigil was a monotonous one; but just as he was beginning to fight against encroaching drowsiness, a shadow stirred outside, and he pressed his face closer against the pane. It was a small figure, and it seemed to be scanning the house as it slowly passed along the pavement on the inner side.

As it moved on he went to the window nearest the entrance, that he might catch a last glimpse of its slow promenade, and then, to his surprise, he saw it *drop* down upon the lowest step, and lean against the stone post which supported the iron hand-rail.

Minutes passed thus. The figure outside seemed to droop more and more, as if overcome with sleep, until, at last, the head lay against the post and was still.

"He's asleep!" murmured the doctor; "and may be discovered by

some stray policeman at any moment." Then he was seized by a bright idea. "*I'll* play policeman," he said ; and in a moment he had slipped off his shoes and was out in the vestibule. The door creaked a little in spite of him, but it did not arouse the seeming sleeper, who only stirred himself when the doctor's hand had closed firmly upon his shoulder.

"Not a word," said he, sternly, and not a word did either utter until they were within the studio, and the doctor had locked the door, and struck a light. Then for a moment the two surveyed each other with mutual curiosity.

At a glance the doctor recognized the boy who had carried his note and attached himself to Miss Payne's carriage later. But when he demanded an explanation, a confession, the lad scoffed at him. Threats and frankness alike were unavailing.

"Maybe I'm watchin' this house, and *maybe* I ain't," he said ; "anyway, you're doin' about the same, an' I'd like to know what *you're* lookin' fer?"

Dr. Vaughan was nonplussed. This boy might be in the employ of Drexel's enemies. He had already told the lad that he was in search of Captain Makofski, but to give his own name might be going too far. Neither could he say that he scented trouble or foul play. This might be simply to put the others on their guard.

"Listen, my boy," he said, finally ; "tell me how much you are paid for watching here?"

"Ten dollars a day," replied the boy, with a malicious grin.

"Well, I can't quite *believe* that," smiled the doctor ; "but I'll give you *twenty dollars* now in your hand, if you'll tell me who set you to watch here, and what you have found out. I shall know, mind, if it is not the truth."

"Naw ye *don't!*" said the boy, with a defiant sniff. "I ain't no sell out, *you* kin *bet!*"

"Well," admitted the doctor, "I like you for that, after all. But tell me this—*why* did you follow that carriage?"

"Look here, mister, you say you'll tell me suthin' first."

"What is it?"

"Tell me where that carriage was *a-goin'*, and I'll tell you why I *follered* it."

Vaughan pondered a moment, thought it could do no harm, and fell into the trap. "Very good," he said, "I agree."

"You first, then ; *I'm* square."

"That carriage," said the doctor, "was going straight to the Oriental Hotel."

"Eh!—*gosh!*" The boy started and darted a keen, distrustful look at the doctor. Something had worked a decided change in his manner and tone.

"Well?" queried the doctor.

"Well—I said I would, and here 'tis. I follered that kerridge *to see where 'twas goin'—of course.*"

In spite of his anxiety and vexation, the doctor laughed. It was clearly useless to prolong the interview. But before he let the boy go he repeated one of his first questions.

"Boy," he said, "did you speak the truth when you said you were not employed by Captain Makofski?"

"Yes, I *did*," he said, but with another quick glance of distrust, "and I'll say it ag'in, if you want to hear it."

Inwardly promising himself not to lose sight of this boy, if he continued to haunt B—— Street, the doctor returned him to his former place upon the door-steps as quietly as he had brought him in, and with greater ease.

* * * * * *

Madeline arrived in B—— Street at an early hour, and found Dr. Vaughan awaiting her, and taking a nap in the studio while he waited.

"It's the only room in the house into which I have ventured to intrude," he explained; "and even here I feel like an interloper, in spite of the unusual circumstances."

"We have bidden good-bye to conventionality," Madeline answered him; and, taking her at her word, he plunged at once into a recital of his night's adventures.

"I shall go to Minna at once," was her prompt comment upon the history of his interview with Minna; "I shall not lose a moment." And then she listened with a perplexed face to his account of his interview with the boy-spy.

"I think he was more than half inclined to believe in me," he said, "until I told him that our carriage was bound for your hotel, and that appeared to arouse a strong distrust in him. I can't understand it."

Madeline was silent for a moment, evidently thinking. In giving him Roger Drexel's letter, she had explained to him those things to which the letter referred, or which it called out, but she had said but little of the Princess as yet, and nothing as to her place of abode. Now, however, she believed that she ought to be perfectly frank.

"I think it can be explained," she said; "I think the boy knows something about the Princess Orloff."

"The Princess Orloff? I think you named her yesterday."

"I did, and now I mean to speak more fully. She lives at the 'Oriental,' and I went there, at Mr. Drexel's request, to keep her under surveillance." And then, without seeming to note the look of surprise and pain upon his face, she began the story. "Mr. Drexel believes her to be connected with these conspirators from abroad," she said in conclusion; "and there is a something concerning her, which I do not understand." Then, seeing a look upon his face which acted upon her like a challenge, she lifted her head proudly as she added, "I owe it to the Princess Orloff to say that she is *not* an adventuress, and the gentle old lady whom she calls mother, is certainly one of the loveliest, the saintliest souls, I have ever known; she reminds me of Mrs. Ralston."

"That is surely high praise."

"It is deserved. Whatever the Princess may be engaged in, and however mistaken she may be, I believe she is *honest*. She is a strange, intense, possibly ill-balanced being, and certainly not to be

judged by ordinary rules. I trust the instinct which tells me, even against appearances, that she is a true woman, that her share in this dark mystery will be made clear, and she prove what I believe her to be."

"And yet you took from her waste basket a proof that one, at least, of Mr. Lord's strange letters was written by her."

"Not so fast; it was written in her rooms, perhaps. Yes, I took that blotter, and it has proved nothing, as yet. I have been thinking that I may do well to go to the Princess."

"For what?"

"If I *go* it will be to tell her my story, and ask her what she knows of 'Captain Makofski,' I think she knows him also as Mr. Hurst, and of Moina La Croix. Remember what I have told you of her visit to him here in this house, and that she claims to have been restrained from visiting Moina La Croix. But *first* I must go to Minna."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

ONLY A LOOK.

ON the evening of the day of her visit to Dissett, Princess Sacha received a brief note from him.

"If you will be alone," it ran, "send me word; I must see you at once and will follow this, if the way is clear." Promptly this word went back,

"*Come!*"

He came as promptly, and she started back at sight of him. The Dissett she knew was always shabby, always stooped and lame, and humble of aspect. The Dissett before her was scrupulously dressed, and held himself erect; his eyes were bright, his cheeks, so often likened to parchment, had a tinge of colour, his expression was alert, keen, animated. His limp was scarcely perceptible; he looked like a bridegroom, this man who had lately been told the name of one he had secretly hunted for years—his brother's destroyer.

"Dissett!" she cried involuntarily, "*This* is what you ought always to have been!"

"It is what I never *could* be," he answered, "until now; that is why I could never come to you." He put down his hat and came nearer to her, and then she noted a something in his manner as new to him as the clothes he wore. A suppressed eagerness that, in another, would have amounted to nervousness.

"What is it?" she said involuntarily.

"Listen, I have formed my plans, and you are not to question me until they begin to go wrong."

"They must *not* go wrong," she broke in quickly.

"They won't, if no one interferes. I have come out of my shell—and this afternoon I threw myself in the way of Jules Passauf; it was easy enough to do, since I have known all his haunts, while he did not dream I was in America. I told him that I had just arrived in New York, and hinted at an important mission, saying just enough to arouse his suspicion and cause some vague alarm. I also hinted

at a desire to see himself and *some others* again ; if the bait takes, as I think it will, he will at once inform Crashaw or Lugos, or both, and the one who hears it *first* will be likely to come to *you* upon some pretext, guessing, of course, that I am sent either to La Croix, that is to them, or to you. Do you quite understand ?"

"Yes, and what is my part ?"

"It is not my plan to confront them *yet*, I want you to face them, and acquaint them with your new authority, *alone*. Are you equal to it ?"

"Bah !" she drew herself very erect. "How far must I go ?"

"Make them aware that you know of their treachery, but do not alarm them too much, they must not think *all* is known. There must be just enough to rouse them to save something, to hold on to what they can. But here, I can write these things best, I have done it so long. Your line of conduct is noted for you here, it needs a little thought, perhaps. You will see that I am leaving it open for me to figure later, as being *their* friend, quite as much as yours. I knew Passauf in Russia, we were once fellow-prisoners ; this will make my rôle seem the more natural, and that is all you need to know."

"Dissett," she said fiercely, "understand I shall follow your instructions here, because by so doing I can best serve M. Hurst. But don't think I mean *that* to be the end !"

"No ?"

"When this is done—all that will be necessary to satisfy M. Hurst and extricate his friends, how great will have been the punishment of these men ?"

"They will be ruined, all, their circle disbanded, they can no longer absorb the revenue of the order, and how else does Lugos live ? Crashaw will lose still more ; exposed, and driven out of the league, he will lose an heiress and a fortune to boot."

"And you think *that* will be punishment enough ?" scornfully.

"What more can there be ?"

"I do not know, I cannot tell ! But I *do* tell you *this*, when all this is done, and done it must be, *then* I will neither rest nor sleep until they are hunted down and made to suffer so that *this* shall be as nothing in comparison. There are other secrets in their lives to be unearthed, and, I tell you, they shall be hunted like mad dogs ! They shall be hunted the world over ! Ah, there *must* be a way, the *law*, slow and uncertain as it is, if all else fails ; but there *is* a way, there *must* be—and you could aid me if you would !"

Suddenly the strange man lifted his hand as if invoking an invisible witness, and his face was livid, as he said,

"Hear me, madam, give me one week, and follow *without question* the instructions written there, and if, *after* that, you are not *satisfied*, if you ask more—you shall command all my service. I swear it."

"I am satisfied," she said.

* * * * * *

Madam Petrolowski had been ailing for some days, and when Sacha hastened to her bedside, after taking leave of Dissett, she found her worse. Feverish, restless and in pain, and all the next day the fever continued and the invalid was unable to leave her bed.

Anxious as she was, this increasing illness was in one sense a boon to the Princess, it furnished her an occupation, and took her mind in some degree off her own thoughts, her own sorrow and suspense.

All day things moved quietly; no word or message came from either Hurst or Dissett; she was in that state of mind when she looked, from moment to moment, for news from some source, and when she sent a little note across the corridor, asking Madeline to come in and help her cheer her dear invalid, word came back that Miss Payne had gone out in the morning and been absent all day.

Just as twilight was falling, however, Madam Petrolowski, who had not slept since near midnight, sank into a quiet slumber, and the Princess stole from the room and made, in her own, a vain attempt to sleep, or even to compose herself to quiet and rest.

From this useless effort she was called to receive a visitor, who had declined, the maid said, to send his name, but whom she recognized at once, from the maid's description, as M. Lugos.

And then, suddenly, all signs of fatigue vanished. She had no need to refer to Dissett's written "suggestions"—she had long since made herself familiar with them to the faintest hint, and, with her nerves tensely strung, restored to strength and self-command, now that inaction was at an end, she swept underneath the drooping *portière* and confronted M. Lugos. Haughty, disdainful, cold, she bowed as she paused near the centre of the room, and bent upon him a look of inquiry. She was not eager for the first word.

"Madam," he began, "my errand is one of inquiry."

The Princess bowed coldly.

"I gave you assurance that only a matter of grave importance would bring me here. I have thought that the disappearance of your compatriot, Captain Makofski, might come under that category."

"Am I to understand that my 'compatriot' is missing, then?"

"That is the case."

"And under what circumstances?"

"Just there is the mystery," M. Lugos answered, without hesitation.

"And since when?"

"Since the night before last."

She is silent a moment, affecting to think, then,

"May I ask why you have seen fit to come to *me?*" she asked.

"Because, Princess, owing to my position, and acting for my three associates, I could not do otherwise. This missing man is one of us, and he is also a man in whom you have shown some interest."

"That will not do," she said, icily. "You have come, you tell me, upon an errand of inquiry; so far you have simply stated a fact. If it *be* a fact, I am obliged to remind you that my time is limited."

Any other man would have struck fire at her cool insolence. M. Lugos only looked a shade graver, spoke with a *soupçon* more of chill politeness.

"I am not anxious to detain you, madam. It was necessary, first, to state my fact, or so I thought. My question, and I ask it *in the name of our order*, is this: Madam Orloff, *what* do you know of Captain Makofski? and *where* is he now?"

The Princess contemplated him a long moment in silence, then

she broke into a low mocking mirthless laugh. They had been standing, but now she turned and deliberately seated herself upon an antique high-backed chair, sitting erect thereon, like an enthroned queen.

"In your own peculiar way, M. Lugos," she said, dryly, "you are certainly unique."

If she had wished to enrage him, she had failed even then.

"An *answer* is what I require," he said; "and madam's time is limited."

Suddenly in this woman's heart there arose a tumult of anger and fierce hatred, of *loathing*, for this man before her. He no longer seemed to her a man merely, but rather a being less than human; a bloodless, emotionless, embodiment of evil, whose whole being found expression in an intense desire for power, dominion, control; who trampled all obstacles under his feet, and knew nothing of remorse.

All this she saw in him and more. She saw, too, the man who, doubtless, had planned the horrible entangling web in which Basil Petrolowski had become enmeshed. And then, suddenly, it came upon her that she had overrated her strength. That she must end this hateful scene, or throw off the mask, and overwhelm him with denunciation. By a mighty effort she mastered herself, and, turning, without a glance toward him, she struck sharply upon a tiny bell beside her.

"Bring me the steel casket from my dressing-room," she said, to the maid who answered the ring. And then she busied herself in selecting a tiny key from a bunch which hung upon a dainty chatelaine at her girdle.

When the casket was placed in her hands, "Go," she said to the servant, and at once unlocked it, and turned back the lid.

"You are about to be freed from a position which must, at times, have been quite too onerous," she began, every word seeming to cut the air, low as they were spoken, "lest your zeal for Captain Fernand carry you too far. I make known to you *now*, what should have been, and must yet be, brought forward later, and in the presence of the assembled superior circle." She dropped her hand into the casket as she spoke, and drew forth what appeared to be a small globe, with the map of the world outspread upon its surface, in tiny lines and figures. The foundation of this globe, or that proportion representing water, was in inky-black, while the earth was marked out in pale hues; and here and there, upon the surface of both hemispheres, were tiny vivid dots of blood-red.

At sight of this, M. Lugos, the imperturbable, started, and his swarthy colour changed.

"Do you recognize *this?*" she asked, icily.

He bowed his head.

She shut her hand upon it, and when it opened, the globe had also fallen in halves, and from its hollow centre she took a tightly-rolled paper. It was of a peculiar colour, and closely covered with writing, like copper-plate. At the top were inscribed certain strange symbols, and the bottom was stamped with a singular seal. Without leaving her chair, she held it out to him.

"Read it," she said. imperiously.

He came forward and took it in silence from her hand. M. Lugos knew when speech was futile; and standing thus, he read the document which gave to the Princess Orloff supreme authority over that portion of the upper circle, and the council which was authorized and supported by the powers abroad; bidding them surrender to her all books, letters, and other documents, and to cease from all action, on behalf of the order, except as she should direct.

There was no disputing such authority, the strange symbolical globe, the cipher seal, he knew only too well. He bowed and returned the paper to her hand.

"This document came to me through M. Dissett, the master's private secretary," she said, "and, of course, will have a formal presentation, at a time which will be made known to you by Dissett The others, of course, must be informed."

Then, for the first time, he had something to say.

"I am not the chairman of the council," he began, suavely; "but this having been made known to me in this manner, emboldens me to ask what are the reasons for this step—the charges—if any?"

"I am not able to go into details. But it is charged that your policy has not been what it was meant to be. That your course has been one of unjustified aggressiveness, that lives and property have been menaced. That deeds that have served personal ends, and ministered to personal greed, hatred, and malice, have been done under the name of the council."

He put up his hand as if in deprecation. "Permit me to remind madam again that I am *not* the chairman of the council. I can scarcely be arraigned for any deed done by the order under the signature of the chairman."

"True." A strange smile flitted across her face. "Rest easy. The blame shall rest where it belongs. No innocent *tool* shall suffer," she checked herself suddenly. "You may inform your chairman, M. La Croix, that an inquiry will be made. I shall expect the books to be placed in Dissett's hands at my order."

"That is M. La Croix's matter," and now his face wears a frosty smile.

"What—*he* has them—I thought Jules Passauf——"

"M. La Croix preferred it otherwise," he said.

"As for Captain Fernand Makofski——"

"My anxiety concerning him is removed, madam," he said. "I begin to comprehend—many things. As for myself——"

She arose suddenly, his last words, and the insinuation they contained, were almost more than she could bear and still be calm.

"As for *you*," she said slowly, and with a gesture of dismissal, "you shall receive justice—*ample* justice, do not doubt it."

When he had gone she took out Dissett's written instructions and glanced at them hastily.

"I did not blunder," she muttered, "I only abridged. I could not draw him out. I *could* not endure another moment in that man's presence. It is more than I can bear. How *can* I face those men and not charge them with their crime?"

She was terribly wrought up; between grief and rage, heartache,

and hunger for revenge, she was fast getting beyond herself, and it was in this mood that Madeline Payne sought and found her.

Madeline had spent a long and anxious day; she had heard all that Minna could tell, had talked much with Vaughan, discussing many plans and theories, and had made sundry purchases, to aid her in carrying out a plan which she had decided upon. Then, as the day passed and no tidings came of either Moina or Drexel, she had said, "I am going to the Princess. I believe she will tell me what she knows."

It was not her intention to betray any part of Drexel's secret, at least, not then—but she meant to ask some very straightforward questions. She felt that she had no time to lose.

She was a woman and she knew women, and when she came into Princess Sacha's presence, she came straight toward her and took her two hands.

"My dear lady," she began, "I have come to you in great haste and in great trouble. I hope to find a little help, a ray of light here. I won't distress you *now* with details, but merely tell you that my interest in Moina La Croix has led me to seek her again, and I find a strange state of things. Looking for her in B—— Street, I find her gone under rather singular circumstances; and while still inquiring into these, the servant who went with her from B—— Street, comes rushing back in search of her," and, without mentioning the names of any of the agents in the matter, she narrated hastily how the La Croix had first been hurried from their B—— Street home, steathily, and by night; and then spirited away from their new abode in the absence of their only servant.

"It is evident that they are under coercion," Madeline concluded, "Mr. La Croix is ill, half-crazed, I should think from all that I hear, and the maid tells me that Miss Miona seems constantly torn betwixt grief and terror, and some form of anxiety and suspense; I am *sure* you know something of these people. But I only ask for anything you may be able to tell me that will serve Moina."

There was no answer in words, but the eyes of the Princess were fixed searchingly upon her face, and her hands clung to Madeline's arm, as if for support.

"But that is not all; not the only mystery. Captain Makofski, strange as it may seem, has vanished, too."

"What? Do *you* know him?"

"Miss La Croix's maid, when she found her mistress gone, came straight to Captain Makofski for aid and advice," replied Madeline, evasively; "and then it all came out—about his disappearance."

"How long has Captain Makofski been missing?" asked the Princess, hurriedly.

"Since yesterday morning."

"At what hour?"

"He was last seen at M. La Croix's, at ten o'clock or a little later. Perhaps I ought to tell you that there was a hasty and agitated interview between Moina and the captain, that he went away in great haste, and Moina was found on the floor in a swoon immediately afterwards."

The Princess presses her hands to her brow, "My head is whirling," she cries. "Let me think! Let me think!" and then Madeline takes closer note of her fevered eyes, her evident agitation.

"Pardon me," she begins, gently; but the Princess motions her to cease.

"Wait," she says, "tell me—has any search been made for—Captain Fernand? Is it certain that he *is* lost? or is he only absent?"

Madeline hesitates for just a moment, then, "A friend is searching for him," she says. "Captain Makofski left a letter, so placed that, if he did not report himself regularly, as safe and well, this friend would at once begin a search. It would seem that there was a reason for this; and the search has begun."

"This person, then, is certain that something has gone wrong?"

"The signal has never failed before. The friend is most apprehensive. Only accident or other misfortune would prevent Captain Fernand from communicating with his friends."

"His friends—oh!" And now it is the Princess who hesitates over her words.

"Tell me," she says at last, "how much do you know of this Captain Fernand?"

"It has been necessary to tell me some things."

"Who is this—friend?"

"A physician of this city; must I say more?"

"No. That enlightens me. Do you—does this friend know him by any name save that of Makofski?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"It is—*Hurst*," replied Madeline with her eyes upon her questioner's face.

"And he is—answer me—what?"

"A detective," says Madeline, then suddenly she changes her tone. "Ah!" she says sadly. "Is it possible that you cannot, or will not, help me, after all?"

And then two pair of eyes meet and gaze and challenge each other, and while they gaze, the curtain is dashed aside and the frightened face of the maid looks in.

"Madam," she pants, "madam, she is worse! She calls for you!"

The Princess utters a cry, springs up, looks wildly about her and then back to the strong pitying face of Madeline Payne.

"Come!" she cries, snatching at her hand, "*you* are strong, *you* are restful—come! She *asked* for you only to-day."

Without a moment's hesitation, Madeline follows her to the sick-room, and in a few moments is ministering to the invalid, directing the frightened maids, and saying comforting words to the unhappy Princess.

There had been no physician, the sick woman had opposed it so strongly, had seemed to grow worse at the mere mention of it, and there had seemed in reality no actual organic disease.

"Can a doctor give her back Basil?" the Princess had said to herself. "She is dying of grief, and she had given her her own way."

But to-night there was a stronger hand at the helm. Clarence Vaughan was waiting for Madeline in her own reception-room across the corridor, and drawing the Princess out of the sick-room, she told her of his nearness, and then said—

"I know her unwillingness to see a physician, and how you have respected her slightest wish, but *this* attack is something serious. You will have something to reproach yourself with if you do not call help now."

"Oh," moaned the Princess now thoroughly unnerved, "do with us as you will, only be gentle; win her over, if you can."

And Madeline went back to the invalid.

"Dear lady, hear me," she said softly. "Surely you love the Princess well enough to spare her an unnecessary pang. Do not make her feel that she is quite powerless to help you! Let her bring you a physician, if only that she may feel that she has done what she could. Ah, she is grieving so! Consent, for her sake." And then she spoke of Clarence Vaughan, telling of his skill, his patience and kindness, pronouncing upon him such an eulogy as would have thrilled his heart could he have heard.

* * * * * *

All night long Clarence Vaughan stood beside the bed of that childless and heartbroken mother, battling with death, and all night long Madeline was the anchor to which the despairing and half-distracted Princess clung, refusing to let her go except as she was needed from time to time, at the bedside. It was a case of failure of the heart, and that night would be decisive, Dr. Vaughan told them from the first, but at the first faint gleam of dawn a change came. The fluttering heart grew stronger, there was breath, perceptible breath, upon the lips. And then Madeline came softly to the place where Sacha Orloff had finally flung herself down in a stupor of grief, and lifting her in her strong young arms, whispered—

"Courage, and be strong. God has been good," and then in answer to the sudden lifting and the quick look upon the agonized face, she added, "Yes, it is past. She is better—she will live for——" but the Princess heard no more, exhausted nature claimed her due, for the first time in her life she had fainted.

And this is how it came about that, an hour later, as Madeline was preparing to go back to Minna and her other cares, the Princess drew her into her own chamber and closed and locked the door. Her haughty head was bowed, her eyes were tear-worn, her manner was strangely sad and deprecating.

"Madeline Payne," she said, "you have been our good angel here—*my* good angel; and—oh! I was *so* alone. But for you I would be *all* alone—but for you. And yet you do not know me, you do not guess." Suddenly she seemed to summon all her resolution. "*You* have a right to hear the truth from me," she said. "I am not just what you think me. Perhaps I am not so *bad* as you think. At any rate, you shall judge. You shall hear the truth concerning that dear

woman there whom you have saved for me, and concerning myself; and then you can judge how much I can help you in your search for Moina La Croix and her lover."

"Her *lover!*"

"I am sure he *is* that. But, listen," and sitting there, with hand tightly held between two burning palms, Madeline Payne listened to the strange, sad story of Sacha Orloff's love and loss; with nothing extenuated, nothing held back—listened, and wept with her, and for her, and gave her her hand, and her prayers, and her pity, when all was done.

And so, when Madeline had gone, the Princess Sacha softened, unnerved, with all thoughts and schemes for vengeance drowned by her tears, hushed by her prayers, and forgotten in her thankfulness, indited a hasty summons and sent it to Dissett.

He came promptly as before, and saw, with something like misgiving, the change in her face.

"She has broken down," was what he said to himself, after a single glance.

She told him everything, and he heard her account of the interview with Lugos with evident satisfaction.

"Thus much is well," he said.

Then followed the story of Madeline's coming, of the disappearance of Makofski, and of Miles and Moina La Croix——"

"La Croix and his daughter must not be left at their mercy," he broke in sharply. "They are in hourly danger."

Last, came the tale of the night's vigil, of Madam Petrolowski's peril; and then his face blanched, and he set his teeth between thin drawn lips.

And then, with the horror and agony of the night still strong upon her, she made her appeal.

"Dissett, my courage has forsaken me! Something within me seems to have broken in two. I cannot see those murderers again! it would kill me! Dissett—release me, spare me this ordeal! I will give you the papers—authority, everything—only——"

He came close beside her and caught her wrist in an iron grip.

"*What* do you mean?" he almost hissed.

"Oh! *don't* you understand me. See, I want *you* to take my place; to——"

A strange fierce light leaped to his eyes. "Do you mean," he whispered hoarsely, "that you wish *me* to act? to assume your authority?"

"Yes."

"*All?* In everything? You will leave the manner, the time—*everything* to me?"

"That is it—yes, yes."

"Not questioning? asking only that the La Croix be spared, and THEY be driven from the city *before further mischief is done?*"

"Yes."

"And you renounce for yourself any other, any further vengeance? When the demands of this detective are satisfied, *you* will rest content also?"

"God help me, I am tortured! But—yes; I cannot go on!"

In the depth of her distress she failed to see the triumphant flash in his small eyes.

"Then I must do as you wish," he said; "it is not what I had planned, for I wanted to see *you* crush them; but it shall be done, *and done well.* Only grant me one thing, and you need never give this business another thought."

"What is it that you wish?"

"To see *her.*"

"Now? It would not be safe."

"I will not speak to her. I do not wish that. Only one look."

"When you come for the papers," she said, "you shall see her, if it is possible."

"It is only a look that I ask," said this strange man, turning away. "I shall want the papers to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXX.

MADELINE'S CHASE.

HE came next morning, and received the talisman and a packet of papers from her hands without a word. They seemed to avoid the subject which, forty-eight hours before, had been the one vital living issue upon which all their thoughts were set, by mutual consent, with mutual relief.

"How is she?" were his first words.

"Better, but sleeping. You must see her so; she speaks to no one."

"Better so," he muttered, and followed her to the bedside of the one woman who had seemed, to his young manhood, an angel of light, whom he had loved well and never forgotten, although his secret had never been guessed, in the old days now dead.

One thin, slender, almost transparent hand, lay uncovered, and the man advanced reverently with bowed head, until close beside the bed. Here he kneeled down, and rested thus a moment. Then he bent forward and touched his lips to that still white hand, seeming to murmur a word which was quite inaudible as he arose, looked once at the worn and pallid face in its frame of snowy hair, and turned away.

When they were back in the little reception-room, he was still silent, seeming to be unconscious of her presence. She waited a moment, and then asked,

"Is—everything arranged?"

"Yes."

"And you are sure of yourself? Of everything?"

"If I am alive at midnight, all will have been accomplished," he said. "Remember, *your* work ends here and now. A report of all that I shall do will go to Sharlaw to-morrow."

"And not to me?"

A strange smile crossed his face. "Oh, you will hear," he said and moved back a pace. "Good bye."

"What?"

"We do not meet again. I shall be gone to-morrow."

"Gone?"

He threw out his hands.

"Don't press me for reasons. My work here ends to-night. Was not that your wish?"

"True."

Again he made a step backward.

"Dissett," she said, suddenly, "you must take some money."

"I?" He drew out a well-filled purse. "Did you think I meant to bribe those assassins? I want nothing, and I must go."

Suddenly she swept toward him, and held out her hand. "You *want* to be gone," she said, kindly, "and I believe you are suffering! God help you, Dissett—good-bye!"

Again he bent his head, as in the sick-room, and touched with his lips the proffered hand; but he did not take it in his own.

"Adieu!" he said, and was gone.

"What a strange man!" murmured the Princess, turning back to the sick-room; and then, in a softer tone, "how he must have loved her!"

Ah! Princess Sacha Orloff, how little you know how you shall hear again of Dissett!

* * * * * *

As these things were happening in New York, Roger Drexel was speeding westward upon the fast express, chafing inwardly, and filled with anxiety because of the new and awful danger into which he knew Hosmer and Savorin were unwillingly plunging. That they had left the city in advance of him, he was sure, but not how far in advance. At the most, he thought, they could be only ten hours' ahead of him, but ten hours in Chicago, expected perhaps, and laden with a quantity of infernal machines! Great heavens! what disaster might not overtake them in ten hours.

And he was totally uninformed. When were those meetings to be? and how was he to conduct his search, that it might be both quiet and quick?

Another thing that had, at first, caused him much perplexed thought, was his neglected letter to Madeline. At first he had thought to telegraph from the nearest station, but he knew that the message would be more than twenty-four hours late, and that Madeline, in all likelihood, had already put Dr. Vaughan in possession of his cryptogram letter. By this time, no doubt, they had begun a search for him. He was not aware that Madeline had penetrated his Makofski mask; and, seeing how her supposed ignorance would complicate matters, he now regretted, for the first time, his unnecessary but natural reticence upon this subject. He had not meant, at first, to be thus secret, but as his interest in Moina had deepened, he had found it easier, simpler, and less liable to misconstruction to keep Captain Makofski and Roger Drexel two separate identities.

"Where will they begin their search?" he asked himself, and then came the thought of Moina and Minna. They would seek Minna, and must go, of course, to the house in B—— Street, and he drew a great breath of relief.

He could trust Madeline, once on the trail, to find Moina's new abode, aided by Minna and the boy "shadow" he had left in B—— Street; and so, he felt sure, Moina would find a friend.

And then he quickly decided that things were best as they were. The time for the *denouncement* had come. All must come out, once he was back in New York. And then he occupied himself in imagining Moina as found by Vaughan and Madeline, and Miles La Croix profiting by the doctor's skill and kindness. Clearly he would *not* telegraph, at least, not until he had reached Chicago.

In the grey of the morning, Drexel aroused himself from a long sleep. It was almost day, and Chicago would be reached in six hours, and then he became conscious of a stir and growing tumult about him. Bells and whistles began their noisy din, then died away in a forlorn wail, and then came a crash, the sound of splintering timbers, and then he was thrown back with unpleasant force, by the backward movement of the suddenly-stopped sleeping car.

Carelessness on the part of someone, a morning fog, a sharp curve, and a "wild" freight train, had combined to stop the express, after it had dashed frantically and reluctantly into the rear of the "wild" train aforesaid, to create a wreck, and to delay Roger Drexel until, perhaps, and he turned cold at the thought, he might be *too late.*

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Madeline had decided upon her course before seeking the Princess, and she found nothing in the strange, sad story of the latter to cause a change in her plans.

She had put Minna in her present position, and she now determined to bear her company. She believed with Minna, that sooner or later someone would come to them who, willingly or otherwise, would lead them to Moina.

At first Dr. Vaughan had opposed this strongly, but she had silenced all his arguments.

"Minna must have a companion," she had said, "and it must be a woman; you agree to *that*, I know. I shall leave the house in B—— Street under your surveillance, for we must not lose sight of that."

She easily arranged all things at her hotel, and leaving in charge, and at the disposal of the afflicted Princess, the maid who had superseded Minna, she went out from that place, to assume again, and for the last time, a *rôle* she had played successfully years before, in the days of her own life's tragedy.

It was to B—— Street that she went first. She entered the house as Madeline Payne, a lady of fashion, in dainty array; and at the end of an hour, during which time she had been closeted with Margot, she emerged; but it was not as a fine lady, not Madeline Payne. The young woman, who came forth and drove with utmost haste to the abandoned suite of rooms in the little court where Minna waited alone, was a trim, tidily-dressed, servant girl, with thick black locks lying low upon her forehead, a mottled complexion, and pale tinted eye-glasses, partially concealing a pair of inflamed-looking, pink-lidded eyes.

"You need never be afraid, miss," said Margot at the door,

"nobody will ever know *you*, not even Miss Moina, if you were to see her; and that bit of cotton just makes you look another shape altogether."

Minna was expecting her late mistress, and was prepared for her disguise; but when Dr. Vaughan arrived, not far behind Madeline herself, and surveyed her in her new character, his anxiety and his opposition were aroused anew, and the old argument was again rehearsed. Since she had heard the story of the Princess, Madeline saw more clearly than before *why* there must be no publicity, why the police must be "kept out of the affair;" but, at last, the doctor won from her two concessions. First, he might place on guard, *outside*, in the little court, a man who was simply to be in readiness in case of need, but was to take no step except at the word from Madeline, and this man was to be one of his own choosing. Second, recalling the fact that Drexel had told her of a certain man or men whom he commanded at needs, and who belonged to the city force, she agreed with the doctor that it would be best to apply to the Chief of Police, as a friend to Drexel, and *not* in his official capacity, for the names of these men, and this accomplished, Vaughan set out at once for the office of the chief, whom he knew very well. There all was plain sailing, the instant the chief knew Dr. Vaughan as the friend of "Hurst," as Drexel was called at head-quarters, and acting with authority from *him*.

"Yes," said the chief, "I know the man you want, and I think he's within call." And in another ten minutes the doctor was face to face with Little Norton.

They were two straightforward men, and they soon understood each other.

"Doctor, I know all about it," said Little Norton, in his characteristic way. "When I first went into this business with Hurst, and mind, I don't pretend that I am on the inside *all through*, he said to me, 'Norton, if things get wrong at any time, and if my friend Dr. Vaughan comes to you for information, remember that he acts for *me*, and be perfectly frank with him. He may need your help.' Now *do you?*" And Dr. Vaughan knew that he had gained a strong ally.

But Norton's knowledge of Drexel, like his own, ended at the morning after the attack in the little park, now three days since.

As the final result of this interview, it was Little Norton himself who took up his station in the little court, after having seen Madeline, and arrived with her at a mutual understanding.

But before he began his watch there, Vaughan took him to B—— Street, to settle, if possible, a question of identity—the identity of the boy shadow. Some time passed before they were favoured with a sight of the lad, but at last he came into view, and then Little Norton broke into a low laugh.

"Is *that* the boy you collared and dragged in here?" he asked, for they were in the B—— Street studio by Margot's kind permission. "That's Dickie Toole, and if he's watching this house, it's for Hurst. He's a lad of Hurst's own training." And before they went away he had established a better understanding between Vaughan and Master

Toole, one which left Vaughan free to attend to his patient at the "Oriental," or to go where he would, assured that nothing would go amiss in B—— Street.

All of these things happened on the day which witnessed Madeline's departure from the "Oriental," after her strange night in the rooms of the Princess Sacha. And the next morning saw her refreshed by a long night's repose, and ready, in her servant's gown, for whatever might happen. She had tripped through the court at an early hour to make a purchase at the nearest fruit stand, and had assured herself in passing that Little Norton was also at his post.

"Ah, me," sighed Minna, as they sat down together to their novel breakfast, "to eat like this seems not to be right."

"But it *is*," put in Madeline, crisply. "Imagine how it would look if someone should walk in upon us and find you serving my breakfast. We may have to live like this for many days, Minna; I do not hope for an easy success."

"Ah, it is of you that I am thinking," sighed Minna.

"Then don't. *I* am thinking of poor Moina La Croix, and so ought *you*." And she, too, sighed.

And now, the better to understand what is to follow, let us go half-a-dozen blocks to the westward of the little court, and pause at the corner, where a big lager beer sign arches the pavement from the top of the corner window to the lamp-post. It is a corner saloon, with convenient doors on two streets, and through one of these doors, that opening upon the busiest thoroughfare, at the very hour when Madeline and Minna are breakfasting, there enters a trim little man, who glances quickly about him, and then seats himself at a table, aloof from the others, and within sight of the lesser door of entrance. For ten minutes he watches this door intently, and, at the end of that time, is rewarded by seeing it swing inward. He does not stir while the person who enters walks the length of the empty saloon, and he is silent when the new comer drops into a chair opposite him.

"Well, Passauf," says this last arrival in a surly tone, "I'm deuced glad to see you're here. What did that message of yours mean? To get a man out at such an hour as this!"

"We have not exactly the time for taking our ease," replies Passauf. "I have seen Dissett again."

"The devil!"

"And I'm to see him yet again in two hours. You see, the time is short. I don't pretend to understand it, but he is willing to *see* you, and hear what you've got to say before the regular hearing. That is, he'll see you *alone*, with the understanding that you, yourself, bring in Lugos afterwards."

"Did he appoint a place?"

"Yes, your own rooms."

"Not—the hotel?"

"That's for you to say. He *said* your rooms."

"Then he can come to the other place."

"Very good. He's to be there at eight, precisely at eight o'clock. You are to tell Lugos to join you at ten, not before."

"Humph! No one ever knew Lugos to be either ahead or be-

hind a fixed time. That man is a machine. And what are you to do?"

"I have the honour of bringing Dissett to your door. One thing, we ought to have the old man's book at once. Did you get it?"

"Hush, that's the devil and all. Do you know there's been a—blunder? That book wasn't brought away with the others."

"Then it must have been left in the other house. It *must* be got."

"Gad, man, you don't expect to let Dissett see *that*, I hope?"

"No, but nobody else must see it. Don't you understand me? Does Lugos know that the book was left behind?"

"No, not yet."

Jules Passauf half arose. "We must go and get that book before *he* does. If it comes to close quarters you know who M. Lugos will look out for. Come, there won't be any trouble. I'll get the book if *you* won't. There's no risk, *yet*."

"I dare say you're right," agreed Rufus Crashaw. "We will get some breakfast, and lose no more time."

"We'll lose enough time to make sure that there's nobody there that we don't want to see," said Passauf, grimly, and they left the place together.

The rooms lately occupied by the La Croix were on the third floor, and facing the front, and it was easy enough for Passauf to inquire of the caretaker on the first floor, and so assure himself that Minna was alone "exceptin' of another girl that has come in to keep her company like."

Minna admitted him promptly, and would have been voluble in her welcome, but he cut her short, and made his way toward the rear rooms, scarcely deigning to glance at the girl who was at the moment keeping Minna company in the little reception-room. He had come for some articles for M. La Croix, he said, as he brushed past Minna, and he could find them without troubling her. And then he closed the bed-room door in her face, shutting himself in.

Almost simultaneously the occupant of the reception-room sprang to her feet, and, with a few quick motions, divested herself of the skirt and blouse of dark blue print which she wore above a gown such as are worn by trained nurses, and catching up from a convenient and obscure corner, where they lay in readiness, a hat, shawl, and small satchel, she slipped noiselessly out, without exchanging a word with Minna, who stood on guard at the dining-room door.

It was a long quarter of an hour before Passauf came out upon the street, and then he came empty-handed, and hastened away without noticing the slouching youth with a shabby bundle under his arm, whom he passed just at the door, nor the trim nurse, who turned away from a shop window, and came out from the court just behind him.

He walked on briskly for two blocks after leaving the court, and then, turning a corner, halted, and accosted a man who stood looking up the street as if waiting for a down-town car.

As before, Madeline paused to look in at a shop window, and the youth with the bundle passed slowly by.

"Follow the *small* man," she said, without turning her head.

But the two men did not separate at once ; instead, they walked on quite slowly, and seemed to discuss something with much earnestness.

But presently they stopped again, and this time they did not linger. With a word and a nod, Crashaw turned and walked down a side street, and Madeline, keeping as near him as was safe, followed unhesitatingly. "It is Rufus Crashaw," she said to herself, "who is most likely to lead me to Moina La Croix."

Rufus Crashaw plodded on steadily and without haste, his head was bent, as if he were pondering, and from time to time he gave an impatient swish with the small and limber cane which he carried. In his self-communings he had forgotten to be cautious, or, perhaps, he felt quite safe in this out-of-the-way quarter, which grew, as he paced on, more and more dingy and uncouth. Two or three times he turned a corner, each time taking them into a worse neighbourhood, the streets growing narrower, and the dirt and children more plentiful.

For more than an hour Crashaw walked on ; street cars jingled past him, and omnibuses rattled this way and that ; but these were left behind at last, and, finally, at the opening of a short street running diagonally from another which was narrow and crowded with tumble-down tenements, he paused abruptly, and looked about him. It was a very hasty glance, and Madeline, who was walking behind two portly German women, was quite concealed from his view. The street into which he now turned seemed newer than the other, and was thickly built up with small and cheap frame cottages of one and two stories height. As he went forward, a little faster now, Madeline slackened her pace. In spite of her courage her heart began to flutter; the street was short, and a little distance ahead it looked as if it ended in a *cul de sac.*

But now Crashaw has gone half the length of the street, and he stops and again looks about him. This time she is in full view and scarcely half a block away ; there is no alternative, and she does not falter an instant, but bears straight towards him, her satchel held conspicuously before her.

But he does not wait for her to pass ; instead, he turns, and goes out of sight down an alley.

Has he turned aside to see her go by? She wonders, and goes on, without changing her pace.

She is at the alley now, and what she sees causes her heart to jump. The houses on either side are quite new, but straight across the alley, blocking it up ; and, half hidden amidst tall fences and rickety outbuildings, stands an old weather-beaten cottage that has evidently been moved back to make room for one of the new buildings, and Rufus Crashaw is just vanishing from sight behind the fence that half conceals the cottage door. Instantly she stops, and, in that instant, sees the top of the partly concealed door open and close again, quickly.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MADELINE AT BAY.

QUICK as thought Madeline sprang across the alley, and, pausing upon the pavement, looked about her, her face turned back the way she had come, as if waiting for someone.

The cottage upon the opposite side was closed, and a board at the front bore the words, "*To rent.*"

That before which she stood was open, and the sound of hammering came from within. She could see people moving about through the open windows.

Madeline had given much thought to this search for Moina, and had faced many imaginary situations. She had not come out at the heels of Rufus Crashaw entirely unprepared for an emergency, and she was quick and futile in expedients.

After a second glance at the house, and all about it, she deliberately ascended the steps. The door was open, and there was a huge pail of paste near it, upon the floor of a tiny hall, together with a keg of whitewash, and several brushes and boards. In the front room two men were at work upon the ceiling. Madeline gathered up her draperies and stepped to the inner door.

"Gentlemen," she said, courteously, "can you tell me if this house is for rent?"

Before the man addressed could reply, a voice from the rear room answered,

"It *will* be when it's finished."

"Thank you, sir; and when will that be?"

"Next week." Here the speaker came into view. "Do you wish to rent?"

"I don't want to wait a week." Madeline felt re-assured at sight of this man. He looked good-natured and honest. She advanced a step, asked if he were the foreman, and, being told that he was, asked permission to look at the rooms.

The house was small, and the kitchen window afforded a view of the upper portion of the cottage in the rear, the lower part being hidden by the high tight board fence.

The foreman was more than willing to talk, and she soon drew from him the facts that this unfinished cottage and its mate across the alley, were owned by the same person, and lately built; and that the finished cottage, although still labelled "To rent," was in reality taken.

"It was taken a week ago," the man said, glibly; "and why the folks don't move in is more than *I* know."

A week ago! Madeline's thoughts flew fast. With both these concealing cottages unoccupied, what an isolated place that rear cottage was! No other occupied building near; surrounded on three sides by high fences and unsightly outbuildings; masked from the street; what a place for a prison—or for evil deeds!

She made her way to the rear window again, and looking out, said,

"Is that a house behind that high fence? What an ugly place!"

"Yes'm. It was moved back off this very lot."

"And does anyone live there?"

"Well, yes. It was empty, though, a pretty long time. Nobody seemed to like the situation," laughing in enjoyment of his joke. "They was goin' to turn it into a stable, thinkin' it would let better that way, when someone took it, and moved right in, not more'n a week ago."

Madeline looked doubtfully at the house, and then asked, with the prim air of a careful house-hunter,

"Are they quiet people?"

The man laughed. "Wall!" he said, "I haint ever seen nobody but an old woman, an' not much of *her*. I guess they wouldn't keep you awake nights."

Madeline dared press her questions no further. She thanked the man for his kindness, took the name of the owner and his address, which she was glad to find was in another quarter of the city, and taking a last look at the hidden cottage, left the place.

She would have been glad to loiter until Rufus Crashaw emerged from the alley; but to do this was out of the question, although she felt sure that he would not remain long in that dilapidated place. She could find no pretext for lingering longer in the cottage, and to loiter upon the street would be folly. So with a backward glance as she turned the corner, she sought out a better street, not too far away, where she made certain purchases.

At a decent drug-store, under the license of her nurse's dress, she purchased a flask of brandy, and sundry carefully weighed-out powders and pills; and, at a gunsmith's, she bought a revolver with six chambers, which she loaded with her own hand.

To a comment of the facetious young salesman, she replied with dignity,

"My duty takes me into very unpleasant places sometimes; the bad need nurses as well as the good, and we must protect ourselves in all ways possible."

Having done this, she entered a neat little café and called for an early luncheon, eating as heartily as she could, and then she went straight back to the street of the hidden cottage.

Madeline Payne had taken a bold resolution, and it led her straight to the cottage door.

"Since I may not send an officer there to *demand* admittance," she said to herself, "since the question must be settled by strategy, *I* will settle it. If Moina is in that place, no time must be lost."

She had arranged her plan of approach, relying again upon her nurse's gown and the contents of her satchel; and she set her teeth and summoned all her courage, as she flitted down the alley and around the corner of the high fence. The door was directly before her, the one window within sight being on the further side.

No one could have seen her approach, and without a moment's hesitation she ascended the two rickety steps, and rapped at the door.

There was a moment of waiting, then she heard a shuffling step

approaching over an uncarpeted floor, a movement on the other side, a key turning in a well-oiled lock, then the door opened a little way. She was close against it as it moved inward, and, assuming a frightened expression, she flung her whole weight upon it, and, in spite of some resistance from the other side, was inside and standing in the middle of a bare and dismal room, before the woman who had opened the door had removed her hand from the latch; and then, while the woman glared, unable to stem the tide of her speech, Madeline, with startling eyes and lively gesture, began to talk in French; volubly at first, then pausing, as the woman made an impatient gesture; and, finally, as if recovering her self-possession, after a severe fright, began again in English,

"I am sure I beg your pardon. I always speak my own language when I am excited. And really those men out there—they must have been drunk, I think! I thought I should never find the place—ah!" She stopped suddenly.

"Hush!" said the woman in a low, stern tone, and like an echo to her word a hollow groan sounded from the room in the rear, clearly heard through the door, which was half-way open.

It all passed in a moment. As she uttered the word the old woman shut the outer door, which until then she had held slightly ajar, and strode quickly past Madeline and toward the other, with hand outstretched. In another instant that, too, was tightly shut, and the old woman's stout frame interposed between it and her unwelcome guest.

But that moment had been enough. Madeline had seen Moina La Croix—Moina, beyond a doubt; but what a face! So pallid, so woeful, with such a strange, wild look in the hollow eyes!

Madeline could hardly repress a cry. It was the face of a mad woman. *What* could have happened—what could they have done to Moina La Croix in two short days to make her look like that?

The woman before her was not a common virago, although by no means prepossessing. She was tall and muscular, with a dark, slim face, small, keen eyes, and thin lips that looked as if they might be cruel. Something in the hard old face struck Madeline as strangely familiar.

Having closed the door, the woman eyed her keenly and long; then she asked curtly,

"Who are you?"

"The nurse, of course." Madeline was thankful for the momentary survey; it had given her time to recover herself.

"You are not wanted here. Who sent you?"

Madeline took on a tone of offended dignity.

"The head surgeon, of course. I suppose you can see that I am a trained nurse." She had effected an entrance here solely to assure herself that Moina La Croix was, or was not, in the house, and with no thought of remaining. With Moina located, she meant to summon Dr. Vaughan, and, if necessary, Little Norton to the rescue. But she had heard the groan of a person suffering; she had seen Moina with a face like death, and her plan was changed. She could not go away and leave Moina La Croix with *that* look, alone, or, perhaps with a dying father, at the mercy of this old woman.

"You may be a trained nurse," said the old woman, "but you're not wanted here. You've made a mistake, and you'd best go." There was a threatening note in her voice.

Then Madeline made a bold move. There was a single chair in the room, and she seated herself, and lifted her laden satchel upon her knee.

"My good woman," she said, with a touch of patronage in her tone, "I dare say you *mean* well, and I dare say you have a good reason for being over-cautious. I am here to take care of an old man who is sick, and very nervous, and I don't *think* I've made a mistake in the place. This place is not *easy* to mistake. The person who sent me is a tall, dark man, with an arched nose and dark eyes, set very deep in his head. He wears a tuft on his chin, and a long, pointed, black moustache; he looks"— with a start, and a keen look at the old face—"*he looks like you.*"

"*What?*" Evidently she had aroused her antagonist, but she went on.

"He calls himself a doctor, and something had been told him which caused him to send me to look after this patient. He sent you a message."

"What is it?" The woman was evidently disturbed.

Madeline had described M. Lugos, and she had done it upon the inspiration of a discovery. A sudden look of the woman's, as she drew herself up and frowned, had shown her what it was that had puzzled her at first. She had seen M. Lugos but once, as he stood at the door of Miles La Croix's studio, on the occasion of his call in company with the Princess, upon Captain Makoski; but she had never forgotten his peculiar face. And here again she saw the deep set eyes, not so dark, but the same in expression, the same nose, the same carriage, the same stern air and firm chin.

"I thought it strange that he should send such a message by *me*, but he declined to write it, *you* may understand why; it does not concern *me*. He told me to say that something unexpected had happened, that you need not follow out the instructions of C——, if he gave any, until you had seen himself."

"Seen *him!*" There was an unmistakable lighting of the keen eyes.

"Met him. If he can come here to-day he will do so, on or before three o'clock; if he is *not* here by that time, you are to come to *him*." Madeline was watching the effect of every word, and she saw the face fall. "Or—he said there was no other way—he *must* hear from the patient, if nothing more; you were to leave me here and go——"

"Leave *you?*"

"Or you are to send *me*, and yourself stay with the patient," finished Madeline, coolly.

"Send *you!* *You*, a stranger!"

"Did *I* say I was a stranger to *him?*"

Madeline had struck fire. She had roused in this cruel-faced old woman a spasm of jealousy that swept away, for the moment, prudence and habitual suspicion.

"Who are you, jade?" she cried, "and what do you know of my

—of *him*? Do you think he will trust *you* sooner than his own—sooner than *me*—than anyone? Why did he send you here, I say?"

"He *said* it was because the case was urgent, and there was no one else, *and* because I was a nurse. *I* don't care about being here, I can tell you, and I don't feel like hearing much more of your insolent talk. I'll go back and tell my gentleman that you won't hear me."

"No," said the woman, sullenly, "I don't understand it. There has been a different plan laid down only to-day."

"By C——, I suppose," broke in Madeline, feeling her way blindly. "Of course, if you study *his* interest."

"What! his *interest?* Is there—is there a *split?*"

Madeline arose suddenly. "I've said enough. Show me my patient, or say you won't; *I'm* not anxious to stay."

The woman was conquered.

"I can't understand it," she said, "but come on."

"Another thing," said Madeline, "the girl must be cheered up, and both be made ready for another change—soon, if he is able. How is he now?"

"Flighty and weak."

"And the girl?"

"Fainting, and more dead than alive, ever since they told——" she stopped abruptly, and glanced severely at her interrogator. "She's just broke down," she growled. "You can doctor 'em *both*, if that's the *word*. Come along."

In another moment Madeline was in the presence of Miles and Moina La Croix.

The room which she now entered was smaller than the one in front, and with two tiny bed-rooms opening out of it. In the larger room, upon a shabby couch, lay Moina La Croix, one hand beneath her head, her eyes fixed on vacancy. She scarcely glanced at the new comer, she looked like a being in whose heart every hope is crushed and dead.

Without trusting herself to speak, and aware that her disguise was not an attractive one, Madeline went to the door of the inner room nearest the front, where lay Miles La Croix. He was flushed with fever, and muttering from time to time, and, like Moina, he did not so much as glance at the stranger.

It was a dreary place enough, and seemed to have been fitted up hastily for its present occupants. There was food upon a table, pushed back against the wall, and a fire smouldered in a little new stove, such as is used by campers-out.

"There," said the old woman, "here are the patients, now you can begin to cure them." And she busied herself about the table. "If you can get that girl to *eat*," she said, over her shoulder, "you'll do more *than I can*."

Madeline had provided herself with sundry little vials of simple homœopathic remedies, and she prepared some of these, and administered them to the old man, who took them obediently, and then went on with his rambling, meaningless talk. Her heart was aching for the poor girl upon the couch, and she was trying to devise some expression, some form of words, by which to address Moina, and so

arouse her attention, when a boisterous knocking caused the old woman to start up with something that was almost a smile upon her face.

"It's *him*, after all," she said, and hastened to the door.

Madeline's heart beat fast. *She* knew that, whoever else it might be, it was not likely to be M. Lugos. And it might be that she would now find herself entrapped, and among enemies. With a swift movement she crossed the room, and seated herself beside Moina, at the same time slipping a hand into the pocket where the loaded pistol lay. She heard the door open, a sharp exclamation from the old woman, the shutting of the door, and then an exchange of hoarse, half-whispers.

Madeline put out her hand, and clasping that of Moina, she whispered close to her ear,

"Moina, be calm. Don't start nor scream. I am a friend—a friend of Captain Fernand's."

The girl shuddered.

"He is dead," she faintly moaned.

Madeline began to understand.

"Be brave," she whispered again, "and *do not believe it; we have no proof that he is dead.*" But even as the words passed her lips, she thought, "After all, can this be the *truth?* Have they killed him?"

Still the whispering at the door went on.

"Moina," she whispered—"quick! before they interrupt us. Who told you that he was dead?"

"Crashaw."

"How? Did he tell you? How?"

"He resisted—the officers, and—was—shot."

"Listen! Did they tell your father that *he* was in danger, too?"

"Yes."

"Moina, Captain Makofski *was not arrested.* Stop! Oh, *don't* cry out! for my sake. *Don't* you understand, dear? Be calm!" For Moina had lifted herself, and was gazing into her face with eyes that seemed to burn.

"Is it true?" she breathed. "Has there been no exposure? Are not the police searching the city for—conspirators?"

"No; it is all false! Moina, if you cry out we are lost."

The girl was panting with suppressed excitement.

"Tell me," she said, "I will be calm; only tell me *who you are?*"

The sounds from the next room grew louder. Madeline put her hands upon Moina's shoulders and forced her back upon the couch; then she pressed a kiss upon her cheek, and whispered,

"I am *Madeline Payne.* Courage! I do not believe he is dead. Hush! Close your eyes. *They are coming!*"

Her hand went back to her pocket; Moina's lids fluttered and closed. In the little bed-room Miles La Croix muttered on, and from the outer room there entered, following close behind the tall old woman, a small man, with a repulsive face, ragged, unkempt, and carrying his arm in a sling.

"So," he said, pausing before Madeline, and leering hideously—"so *this* is the young lady that has got into our den under false pre-

tences, eh? Sent by Lugos, was she? Well, *I* was sent by Lugos, too. You and I both can't be messengers of Lugos, missy. Shall we try conclusions, eh? This is a bad place for a spy, *a very bad place*." He thrust his grimy left hand into his breast, and the woman began to move toward the two girls from the other side.

The couch stood in a corner, and by turning in her chair Madeline could command two sides of the room. She did not rise, but as the man uttered his last word, the glittering little six-shooter confronted them.

"Stand back, both of you," she said. "I can call help by firing a shot. I don't think you care to see the police *here*."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE DAGGER—AT LAST.

IT is evening, and Rufus Crashaw sits alone in his room awaiting the coming of Dissett. All has not gone as he had hoped and planned when he left English shores for America less than a year ago. Much has miscarried, much is still in doubt. And yet, as he sits, he is thinking that all is not yet lost. He is reviewing the past, and hoping and planning for the future.

He no longer pins his faith to the "council" and its plans; too many of these have already gone awry. He knows now that the power is about to fall from the hands of the three who have wielded it so ruthlessly, and he would look forward to the expected investigation with greater anxiety, did he not believe, having been so assured by Passauf, that the man Dissett is disposed to deal gently with him; that this meeting, in fact, was arranged to enable them to decide how he, Crashaw, might be brought off, if not blameless, at least, not responsible, for all the evil wrought by the three. Of course, there must be a scapegoat, but he and Passauf have considered the matter, and decided that it need not, and must not, be themselves. They will play into each other's hands, and leave the burden of guilt to rest upon the shoulders of M. Lugos and of Miles La Croix. Miles La Croix's guilt will be proven by the fact that he *has fled* and is not to be found, even by his fellow-councilmen. And Lugos—well, it will be a case of his word against theirs, two against one.

In reviewing the situation and its chances, Crashaw congratulated himself upon three points in his favour.

First: He had been careful from the first to conciliate Passauf by treating him like a person whose opinion and advice was held at high value by him, and by him only; for Passauf held, in the circle, decidedly the lesser rank, and he had confirmed Passauf in the opinion that Lugos held him, the scribe, in light esteem.

Second: He had been careful to leave no documentary evidence against himself, and had left the giving of orders and the dealings with third parties to others, whenever possible; using craft and disguise when assuming authority in his own person.

Third: He was better known to Sharlaw than was La Croix or Lugos, and there was no "record" against him.

And last: If the worst came, if to-night's interview gave him reason to fear that all would not be according to his hopes, there was Moina La Croix—and her fortune. For he had laid a snare, so he assured himself, from which his victim must inevitably and soon fall into his arms.

And, again, here he congratulated himself: How fortunate for him that he had feigned reluctance, and assented to the final attempt upon Captain Fernand, only upon condition that he be given his "chance" with Moina La Croix.

And—again he hugged himself—How *well* it had worked! From the moment when with Passauf he had burst in upon La Croix with the startling news that all had been discovered; that the council were in danger of arrest; that they must again seek a safer hiding-place, Miles La Croix was ready enough to take them at their word, and to flee. But how Moina had rebelled! He frowned, as he recalled her scorn and aversion. Ah; but he had conquered *her* at last! There was no more rebellion, when he graphically related how the police had begun their work by attempting to arrest Captain Makofski, and how he had resisted, and been shot before he would yield.

Poor Moina; she had fallen at his feet like one dead. For how could she guess that such a tale could be wantonly told? When she was able to hear him, he had added that the captain was not dead, but had been taken to an hospital, dangerously wounded; and then, weakly and wearily, she had consented to another flight; not even asking whither.

And Crashaw, blinded by his misdirected jealousy, already wreaked upon Rene Savorin, had said to his confederate,

"Well! I expected a fuss on the old man's part. But who would have supposed *she* would faint at the news of Makofski come to grief? I suppose it was the shooting. It will be time enough to tell her about Savorin when we get the news. It won't be long." Whatever Passauf may have thought of Moina's conduct, and he was not blinded as was his confederate, he held his peace. This phase of Crashaw's plotting was not interesting to him.

This, then, was the blow which had stricken Moina. Believing her lover to be dying, and that she must not go to him, because to do so might betray her father, whom she could not desert, and who, she believed, was a hunted man, she lay in that forlorn hovel, tortured, suffering, yet with one little ray of hope, until Rufus Crashaw's visit of that morning, when, because he saw that the poor old man still clung to the hope that, somehow Makofski would recover and find him out, and to cut off all hope that might breed delay or opposition, he struck the last blow by telling them that Fernand Makofski had died in the night of his wounds.

And then the sense of her father's need, and her duty to him, his constant cry for her hand upon his temples, was all that kept Moina La Croix from utter madness.

And for all this misery you must answer, Rufus Crashaw!

And now the hour has come and with it comes Dissett, conducted by Jules Passauf, who, understanding his rôle, leaves him at the door.

The room which Dissett enters is a luxurious one, for the living which Crashaw exacts from the world is one of ease, and on the table, where chairs are drawn up, are liquors and pipes and cigars. Crashaw has prepared for conquest.

The man who enters is very grave ; there is something in his eye and voice which check the light words with which Crashaw had meant to welcome him, and it is Dissett who speaks first ; this strange man who, here, at the goal of all his hopes and scheming, is like a man of ice, as cold, as merciless and unswerving as fate.

" M. Rufus Crashaw," he begins, " I hope you know perfectly why I am here, and how absolute is the power put into my hands, first by the master across the sea, and last, by the lady who represents him here. I am told that you have certain things to say for yourself ; I am willing to hear them. But I must warn you. They may have no weight in the final settlement. It is my duty to say this, and having said it," here he seats himself opposite Crashaw, " we understand each other."

For the first time Crashaw allows himself to smile. He believes that he understands this grave preliminary speech. He has made the like, or so he thinks, upon occasion ; and then he makes his reply.

He is aware that his position is difficult, and it is not for him to point out the primary causes, the *reasons* why authority has been perverted abroad. He would choose *not* to make a statement, but is willing to answer questions, and so far as he is concerned, he courts inquiry.

Dissett takes some papers from his pocket and refers to one of them. His face has not relaxed. " You will find yourself taken at your word. Let me tell you of what you are accused with the others. First, of placing Miles La Croix nominally at the head of your officers, and then so working upon his mental and physical infirmities as to cause him to do *your wills*, at a time when he was really *not* responsible for his acts or for yours, as your leader."

Crashaw started, he had not looked for *this*.

" Second, for misappropriating funds collected for specific purposes, and for causing other funds to be raised for fictitious purposes. It is charged, under this head, that large sums have been used unlawfully, and that, instead of trying peaceful measures, the aggressive policy has been pressed to the utmost, strikes have been incited, property destroyed, lives threatened, *and lives taken;* and all this because *this* was the policy which brought in the largest revenue, and rendered the chance of quiet thought and inquiry into matters financial least. It is said that *even now* there is a list of 'condemned' who are to be despatched in the near future. That these plots and schemes extend beyond this city, that a great outbreak has been planned, a *dynamite plot*, menacing lives and property; and that when *this* begins, and while the attention of those who might otherwise interfere is directed elsewhere, two or three men, having obtained control of the funds, intend to seize them, and desert their post, enrich themselves, and leave their dupes to suffer for their evil deeds."

The sweat is standing out on Crashaw's forehead; he has *not* anticipated this, and *it is all true.*

"It is as well to say here that denial would be useless. Sharlaw, the master, never put so much authority into the hands of a few without guarding *in the only way* against treachery. We knew everything, and now, tell me, are you as ready to be questioned, and to answer, as you were a short time ago?"

Crashaw's mind worked fast, under such terrible pressure. He knew the penalty for such treachery as this of which he had been accused. He knew, too, the value to the cause of that which he might tell, and he knew that in this lay his one chance, all else was lost. Let him make the best bargain he could for himself, and then—why he would palter no longer, he would turn the last thumb-screw. Moina could choose between her father's safety with him as her husband, or the doom which would await him once he was denounced as false to "the cause," and his hiding-place discovered. Yes, she should leave that cottage as his wife, or see her father die a traitor's death.

The voice of Dissett recalls him.

"What is your answer?"

"I am at your mercy," said the craven; "I will tell you all."

"Everything?"

"Expecting, of course, the usual clemency."

"Let us speak plainly. You will tell that which will condemn your late confederates, and by so doing save your own worthless life!"

The man bowed his head sullenly. "You have me at your mercy," he said again; "you can say what you will."

Suddenly Dissett's manner changed. He pulled a glass towards him, and poured himself a generous measure of brandy.

"Let us waive that subject now," he says, in a lighter tone, "and let us not be so gloomy. Let us drink your health, and speedy release from all troubles. And now let us be personal. I want to tell you of a certain matter—a matter concerning myself."

A ray of hope dawns in Crashaw's breast. Perhaps, after all, this man has been playing a part. At least, he will meet him half-way. He puts out his hand for the bottle, and fills his own glass.

"I am told," says Dissett, in his lighter tone, "that you have been often here, that you know the city well?"

"Yes," hesitating a little.

"Then, perhaps, you can tell me something. I much wish to know—let us see. You knew, I presume, that I knew your friend Passauf long ago in Russia? Yes, it is true. We were never friends, but we were once fellow-prisoners. He was released, I don't know how or why, *I* escaped."

His voice takes on a retrospective tone. Crashaw eyes him in amazement. What can this sudden changing of his subject mean? But Dissett goes on.

"Passauf left Russia at once, but I—I staid in spite of the danger. *I* had something to keep me. I had a younger brother, like myself, a prisoner in the mines, *and* I loved a woman, a woman who did not love me, who loved and married my friend—my rival." He pauses, and turns to look at Crashaw.

"You are not at ease," he says. "You are thinking of this exposé. Be easy, I do not intend to make you a sufferer, because of the misdeeds of *the council.* I do my duty, but there are other things I care for more. There are, after all, greater sins than those."

Can he believe his ears? If these words mean anything, they mean reassurance. They mean that he need not fear the coming ordeal. The blood rushes back to his heart, and to his face. But what a strange man this is. He is puzzled; but he sees his rôle clearly. He must propitiate, he must humour this erratic mind. He puts on a look of interest.

"Thank you," he ventures, "you were about to say——"

"Ah—yes. Where was I?" He turned and took up one of the pipes, then put it down again. "Shall we smoke?" he asked

Crashaw assented, and Dissett hastily produced a large cigar-case filled with small fragrant pale cigars. He gazed at them a moment, and a cold glitter came into his eye as he held the case toward Crashaw.

"They are Russian," he said, "of the choicest."

Crashaw took one and his hand lingered over the case.

"Take freely," said Dissett, and he drew out two others and laid them at his elbow on the table. "Were you ever in Russia?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes," said Crashaw, bringing forward a bronze match-safe and proceeding to ignite one of the cigars.

"Ah!" Dissett began to talk rapidly, "I seem to be rambling, but you will see my meaning presently. See, I will talk while you smoke. You have been in Russia; you have been in the mines, perhaps? Yes," as Crashaw nodded, "then you know how men can suffer." He was watching Crashaw's every movement covertly, but with growing intentness. "And *I* knew—I *know.* Do you like the weed?"

"Excellent!" answered Crashaw, beginning to send up wreaths of smoke, filling the room with a subtle fragrance.

"I know," went on Dissett, "because my brother—my only brother—younger than I by full ten years, died there—died—*horribly.*"

There was a strange thrill in his voice, Crashaw glanced up quickly, then dropped his eyes and said, "I—I am interested."

"Then you shall hear the story briefly—even now—even to you, I cannot dwell upon it. He was to have been released soon, but he was burning to send a word to his sweetheart, who had been faithful through years and trouble, and so he wrote a letter and intrusted it to a man, an Englishman, like yourself, a 'tourist,' who pitied him and won his confidence, who took charge of his letter, and gave it—ah! he gave it to a tender sweetheart! He was *a Government* tool, this man——"

Crashaw started, and the cigar almost fell from his fingers; he could feel the eyes of his companion fairly burning into his face, and to conceal it as much as he might he replaced the little cigar and began to puff vigorously, sending up the white smoke again in eddying circles.

"He gave that boy's letter," went on Dissett, in a low metallic voice, to the Post-Commandant. He could not *wait* for his reward of

paltry roubles, and poor Serge—do you know how they punish convicts in the Kara mines? Ah! *my brother's blood is upon the head of that treacherous English spy!*"

He put his cigar from between his fingers. It had not even been lighted, and again he eyed his *vis-à-vis* keenly. This time Crashaw did not look up; he smoked steadily, his cigar was more than half gone.

Dissett turned in his chair, and rested a clenched fist upon the table between them.

"When Serge died," he said hoarsely, "I took a solemn oath to hunt the world over to find that man, *and to be revenged.*"

Crashaw's cigar grew suddenly dim; his face was deadly pale.

"But fate was against me," went on Dissett. "I could not so much as learn the man's name, and I had never seen his face." His tone changed and became less tense. "I had no longer an interest of my own," he went on, "so I began to watch the career of the son of the woman I had loved so many years ago. But he, like Serge, had lifted his hand to break the yoke and help free Russia. And so, one day, *he* disappeared, and left his mother broken-hearted. He left another. He left a woman who loved him as devotedly and as hopelessly as I had loved his mother. Chance threw in my way a tiny clue, and I followed it. It took me to France."

Crashaw's face was averted now.

"I found in France that the lad I was following had been sent to America, after taking a solemn oath to do the duty that should be assigned to him upon the other side. Am I wearying you?"

Crashaw turned in his chair like a man impelled by some exterior force. His face had grown of a dull uniform redness. His eyes looked strangely dark and their pupils contracted, the stump of the cigar now smouldered between his lips with his teeth shut upon it like a vice. He *looked* like a tiger about to spring, but he sat moveless, and his lips framed the single word, "No."

"Before leaving Paris I had learned this man's name, or the name he had chosen to adopt, and I hoped to trace him by that. But he had changed it and I lost him. For a long time I lost him utterly."

Crashaw made a futile effort to rekindle the fragment of his cigar, then he took it from between his lips with a slow stiff movement, and let it fall unheeded to the floor. Dissett watched its fall and smiled sardonically.

"But, though I missed the man," he resumed, "I came upon his trail again. This man was bound to cross my path, to double my debt to him. Under the name of *Croizon* he had caused the death of Serge Ivanovitch, under the name of Croizon he had dogged Basil Petrolowski, the son of the woman I loved, to America, and driven him to his doom; forced him to shed innocent blood, and then to suffer death upon the scaffold." He pushed back his chair and stood erect, looking down upon his victim. "Rufus Crashaw, *why* should I concern myself with your later treacheries, when, long before I knew you a traitor to your cause, I held you already condemned?"

His hand went swiftly to his breast, and standing thus, with eyes that seemed to dart flame and cheeks wherein the blood seemed con-

gealed in great purple spots, with teeth gleaming through their drawn lips like the fangs of some ravenous beast of prey, he stood gazing down upon his foe. Then suddenly the hand flashed out and downward, and then, in the centre of the table, upright and quivering in the wood, stood *a long and slender dagger*. It was directly before Crashaw, and much nearer to him than to the man who had thrust it there, but Crashaw never stirred. Never in all his life had he been more clear-headed, more keenly alive to all about him, more mentally alert than at that moment. All that he had done and left undone, all his crimes, his risks, his hopes and fears, seemed to pass before him in a lightning-like panorama. The full meaning of that dagger vibrating before his fascinated gaze, all was clear to him. He knew that they were alone, those two, and that Dissett was the elder and smaller. All this he knew, but he never stirred nor spoke.

"How many murders have you to answer for?" went on the terrible voice. "There is Serge and Basil, it is for *them* you are punished *now*, in some other world you may, perhaps, answer for the rest. For that old man who died because he looked to much like Lord, the banker; for the poor servant who slept in the banker's bed. Yes, I know it was Basil who struck the first, but it was *you*, you and Lugos and Passauf, who planned the deed, and forced him to its execution. It was Tansig, 'the Spider,' who killed the footman, but it was *you three* again, who planned it; and how many times did you attempt the life of the man you called Fernand Makoski? *Once* when 'the Spider's' arm dropped, broken by a blow from the captain's loaded cane; *once* when you had penned him, six to one, in a desolated house, so you thought, and when a frail girl thwarted you and saved him; and again when you set your tools upon him in the little park. Shall I tell you *why* your emissaries failed? Because one of them was a clever amateur detective interested in hunting you down. Why did you and Lugos distrust Makofski? Ah, you feared him, because you thought him *too* loyal to the cause to which *you* were unfaithful. What would you have done, could you have known that *he*, too, was a skilled detective, hunting you down, and that Captain Makofski has been in an honoured grave for years? Will it please you, perchance, to learn that Madam the Princess, who knew all this, *permitted* it—because—this same detective was hunting *you!* Yes, Rufus Crashaw, the man who traced you, step by step, as the murderer of Basil Petrolowski, is the man you know as 'Captain Fernand.' You have woven a web to entrap poor Moina La Croix, and you have plotted against Rene Savorin, because you believed him her lover. Fool and blind! Her lover, and *the man she loves is 'Captain Fernand.'*"

Something like an electric shock seemed to pass over the frame of Crashaw. He uttered a sound that was almost a howl, for the first time he essayed to rise, and his hand went out toward the dagger, still upright in the wood; but it was a fruitless effort. At the first movement a trembling seized him, and strange darting pains shot through his frame, his hand fell nerveless, even the fingers refusing to do his will, strange lights flashed before his eyes, there was the sound as of a cataract in his ears, and through it all his mind worked strong and clear. At last he found his speech.

"Devil!" he cried. "What have you done to me?"

"I have avenged Serge and Basil, I have kept my oath, I have finished my life work! My cigars are powerful, Rufus Crashaw! They came, as I told you, from Russia, and they have been *steeped in the juice of a death-dealing herb* that grows about KARA! nourished, perhaps, by the blood and bones of prisoners betrayed."

The wretch in the chair writhed and lifted up impotent hands, the strange drug was doing its work; he was powerless to do more than move slightly now, and horrible rending pains were shooting through his body.

"All your life," went on the relentless voice of his executioner, "you have been selling yourself inch by inch, breath by breath, for gold, selling yourself, and *selling others*. Nothing has been sacred to you—you have known no compassion, no pity. First, it was your brother's life that your tried to take, and, failing in that were driven out of your native place. *Since then* you have gone up and down in the earth a noisome thing, you were amassing wealth, too!" Crashaw shuddered, and a look of unutterable hate rested upon his face. "A man who will stoop to any vice can always command his price. And more than once you came to America as a spy and carried back to England the report of your investigations; you saw your hoard increasing. But you came back once too often. When you went back, after you had done Basil Petrolowski to death, you should not have returned, but you saw a golden bait, and you came once more to work your will with an old dreamer, to play upon his passions and prejudices, and work his ruin, while you enriched yourself! But the Nemesis was on your track. And *now*—NOW—*pray, Rufus Crashaw*, pray if you believe in a God who forgives, for the poison is doing its work. Do you feel it dancing through your veins, yet binding you hand and foot? Rise, poisoner—assassin—Judas! Stretch out your hand! cry out! This poison has an antidote, a simple one—if you could get it. Ah!" as a spasm of agony passes over his victim's face, "but it is not for you! Speak! *Can* you speak?—if not!" He turns away with a stifled curse, the poison has outstripped him, he has wasted his time in taunts, and now the question he would have asked can never be answered in this world.

And now the dark face of Dissett is terrible to see, it is the face of a demon, a mask through which the repressed passion, the thirst for vengeance, the awful hatred is slowly filtering, shining out at the eyes, while all other demonstration is yet suppressed by that iron will. He looks at his watch, and then turns again to the man before him, watches him for a moment in silence, and then puts out his hand and withdraws the slender dagger from the table. "It has other work to do," he mutters, as if to himself, then he bends toward his victim. "Rufus Crashaw," he hisses, "I leave you to die alone. I have revenged Serge and Basil Petrolowski, and I have rid the earth of a vampire. If you and I meet again it will be in another world, and then, as here, I shall not fear to face you. May the Lord of all judge between us. You have ten minutes left to you of life." For a moment he hovers near his victim, then he goes out softly, stealthily, and closes the door, but he does not lock it.

And Rufus Crashaw? With his mind horribly alert, he sits realizing his doom, yet powerless. Like a panorama the scenes of his life pass in review before him, and with the clear vision of dissolution, he sees himself as he *is*, as he *has been*, to the eyes of men and angels. He can see the clock opposite him; he can count out the minutes left to him—very few now. Once he makes, or thinks he is making, a frightful straining effort to call out—to stir; then he knows how useless it is. Still the visions throng before him, the faces of his victims—it is horrible! The face of Moina La Croix, as she looked when he told her that Makofski was dead, rises white and woeful, and he tries to avoid its gaze; he drops his eyes, and sees—there, just before him—two cigars—two of the Russian cigars steeped in the juice of the weed of Kara. Swift as lightning comes a thought; dying as he is, it is a horrible thought. Then an awful sensation comes over him, a crashing and rending. There is a convulsive movement, he falls forward, and his head rests on the table close beside the fragrant cigars—the weeds of death.

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

Dissett goes swiftly out from the great building, and is at once joined by Jules Passauf.

"He has not come?" are Dissett's first words.

"No; he is no more than due at this moment. What do you want with me now?"

"When we have seen M. Lugos enter here, I will tell you." They draw back and wait in the shadow. But not for long. M. Lugos comes promptly, passes them, and enters the great door.

"Now," says Dissett, "you remember your promise, I suppose."

"It's not easy to forget such a one," is Passauf's surly reply. "I am to do your bidding, and go free, or refuse, and take the consequences."

"You are to obey, and be permitted to leave the city, or refuse, and be placed upon the list of *traitors*," corrects Dissett. "Which is it to be?"

"I have *told* you," says Passauf; "what must I do?"

"First, you are to go to M. Lugos's apartments *at once*. You are to enter, and leave upon his table, *this*." He drew Passauf toward a ray of light, and flashes the slender dagger before his eyes. Its effect is magical. Passauf is reduced to abject, terrified compliance. "You are his confidential messenger," goes on Dissett, "and I *know* that you have access to his rooms. When you have done this, you are to take a message to Madam the Princess Orloff."

Passauf started.

"But, first, tell me, where are Miles La Croix and his daughter?"

Dissett makes a sudden gesture. "Answer quick," he says, sharply. "I have little time and less patience. Where are they?"

Passauf tells him reluctantly.

"You are to tell this to the Princess," says Dissett.

"I?"

"*You!* And now come. I have a carriage near, for I don't trust you overmuch, Passauf. Great as is your present danger, you *might* think you could escape me. I am going to *see* that you deposit the

knife, and deliver the message. *Then* you are free to go. But, remember, you must not be in this city when the sun sets to-morrow!"

* * * * * *

Expecting to meet Dissett, the man who was now his authorized superior, and wondering not a little what would be the outcome of this meeting, Lugos approached the door of Crashaw's apartment and tapped lightly.

There is no answer, and no sound comes from within. Wondering a little, he enters. The room is brightly illuminated, and the only occupant sits with his back toward the door, half hidden by the tall chair back. One hand hangs lifelessly over the arm of the chair, and the first forward step shows him that it is Crashaw, and that his attitude is a strange one.

"Crashaw!" Instantly he is beside the table, with a hand upon the recumbent shoulder. Then he bends down, looks into the averted face, and suddenly recoils. But he is a man of iron nerve, and in another instant he has lifted the fallen form and laid the bowed head back upon the chair cushions. Then he *does* start and shudder, for the wide open eyes, with the look of horror in them, have rested upon his own, for an instant, with a glance of intelligence, of recognition.

"Crashaw!" But the end has come; he searches for the pulse, listens for the heart beat, the breath—useless all. "*Dead!*" he mutters, and turns and makes fast the door.

With keen eye and steady nerve he approaches the dead, and once again looks for some sign of life. "Apoplexy," he says at last, dropping the lifeless hand, and then he looks about him. There are the liquors in the unsealed bottles, and the glasses, both of which have been drained. He sniffs at the liquor, and sets it down untasted; then he takes up one of the small cigars, looks at it, smells it. M. Lugos cares little for wines, but is a *connoisseur* in cigars. A moment he inhales the strong perfume, and then takes up the second cigar, and thrusts both into his pocket. Now he turns again to the dead man, and coolly begins to search his pockets, inspecting everything, and returning his watch and money, sundry letters and papers—all, in fact, save two or three thin folded papers, a bunch of tiny keys, and one larger one. Then he looks once again at the dead face with the horror frozen upon it; looks coldly, calmly, as he has done all else, and, last, he replaces the body in its former position, with the hand hanging at the side and the head upon the table. This done, he goes out without a backward look, *and leaves the key in the door.*

Outside once more he begins to study the situation. It is not passing strange to him that a man of Rufus Crashaw's physique and temperament should die of apoplexy; "given a cause," and what was that cause? Over-excitement, no doubt: apprehension, perhaps the result of Dissett's communication. They had met, obviously, and had drank together; then—there must have been a difference, and Dissett had left, in anger, perhaps, not choosing to wait for himself.

"Yes," he says, "that must have been the way. And then, Crashaw, baffled and enraged, over-stimulated, perhaps, by the cognac, had fallen over in a fit."

After all, how would this death affect *him?* That there had come a crisis in the affairs of the council he well understood. Left alone, with no one to gainsay him, no one to oppose his hazardous tactics, might he not pull through yet? If Crashaw should not be discovered until the morning, all might yet be well. He could write Crashaw's name as well as could Crashaw himself, and to-morrow morning he might possess all of those funds, which could not be drawn without Crashaw's signature, his own, and that of Miles La Croix. He stopped suddenly. It was late—but what of that; he would *have* the signature of Miles La Croix without waiting for the morning, only he must not go in that dress. After all, was not Fate on his side? What a chance! The scratch of a pen now, a bold stroke, a moment of risk, and wealth was in his hand. He smiled triumphantly: he believed in his own evil star. Disaster had fallen upon all his confederates only to serve and enrich *him!* "After all," he said, half aloud, "the risk is little; I feel confident of success! The thing is as good as done."

His rooms are not far from those occupied by Crashaw, and he is already half-way there.

With the smile of triumphant cunning still upon his face, he pauses at a corner and takes out one of the little cigars.

It is a peculiarity of the man that, when troubled or engaged in planning or scheming, he touches neither wine nor cigars; but when the conclusion is reached, the problem solved, he finds rest and comfort in smoke.

He has decided upon his course, and now he lights one of the cigars which, his trained senses tell him, are of a foreign and superior brand.

Puffing vigorously, he strides on through the cool night air, and is soon fitting the key in his own door.

He enters the room with a quick step, and turns up the burner over the reading table. Then—never before, not even when he stood beside the corpse of his confederate, when he caught that haunting death look, was he as pale as now; and yet there is no corpse here; and no sign of human presence, except—there, directly underneath the lamp, quivering in its gleam, *is the dagger in the wood!* Up to that moment he has not ceased to smoke, but now he slowly removes the weed from between his lips—it is almost consumed already—and slowly seats himself with his eyes fixed upon the gleaming knife. There he sits thinking—thinking. How has this deadly messenger come? No one save Passauf has access here; and it *cannot* have come through Passauf! Upon Crashaw, whose normal mental processes were slow, the fatal drug had acted as a mind stimulant. But, strange as it surely was, upon this man of alert mental habit its action was not the same. His thoughts came slowly, laboriously, and seemed to repeat themselves over and over. But he was not yet beaten, or so he tried to assure himself. He would make one more effort. He would write Crashaw's name, and he would go as he meant—yes, just the same, only, he would go doubly armed, and in a carriage all the way. He *must* secure the signature of Miles La Croix; and then came the attempt to rise, the strange sensations in head and limbs, the rending pains.

But M. Lugos is a physician, trained, and he knows, when he has repeated the effort to rise and failed again, that he has been *poisoned!* Poisoned? yes; but how? He lifts his hand with the cigar stump still between his fast numbing fingers, glances at the dagger before him, remembers the scene in Crashaw's room. He sees again the two cigars, as they lie beside the bottles and glasses, and he *knows* now that Crashaw has not died of apoplexy. Crashaw, too, had been visited by the dagger; and Dissett—Dissett, the emissary, is the executioner!

Once again he attempts to rise, and fails. Then, with the look of a baffled fiend, a look of frenzy and of fear, he lifts his hand. It obeys him still, and he puts it behind him and draws out a pocket pistol. At *least*, he will not die by inches, he thinks, and lifts his hand. Then, over that dark face, now corpse-like and awful to see, comes a look of horror, unutterable and hideous; imprecations fall from the stiffening lips, as the fingers refuse to press the trigger, and the weapon falls from his hand. What the man was and is, is written on his face in this awful last hour; and Death comes slowly—she is merciless—draw the curtain—leave them alone together.

Tried—condemned—executed—to appear at the bar of God.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE HAYMARKET.

EVENING in Chicago. The fair city is aglow with lights, palpitating with life. Everywhere there is the usual stir of the early evening, when the pleasure-goers are all abroad, and in one part of the city there is more than the usual stir. At Randolph Street, and the thoroughfares adjoining, as we near the bridge and pass over it, men are hurrying along, singly and in groups, and all, or so it seems, going in one direction, westward.

Crossing the bridge, with many others, is Roger Drexel; he is walking apart as much as maybe, and is evidently alone.

He has doffed his attire of fashionable cut and make, and is roughly dressed, like some artizan in his working clothes. His face is grave even to anxiety, and he glances about him constantly, scanning each passing face. He has been in Chicago some twenty-six hours. After having been delayed ten, and in spite of constant and sleepless effort, he has found no trace of Savorin and Hosmer. He has tried all the haunts where they might naturally appear; has searched hotel registers; has sent out detectives in plain clothes; but all to no purpose, and now he is hurrying toward that spot, which is neither court nor square, that great, oblong, open space where the street widens out from the river, to narrow again suddenly at an intersecting street.

Homely ground enough at this hour, "unhonoured and unsung," with no lofty palaces to serve as landmarks; a place of homely sights and often of unsavoury smells; a "lovely mart of trade," and yet a place which, in one short evening, is to become historical, the scene of a world-execrated crime, a widely-lamented tragedy—*The Haymarket*

Already the street is filled with a surging crowd, and here and there a blue-coated officer is seen silently watchful.

As he nears the edge of the restless mass, Drexel slackens his pace, and, glancing about him, comes to a halt. There is nothing to be seen here, and little heard; but it is a good place for a rendezvous, and that is what it is.

He has hardly halted before a man has joined him, and before they have exchanged greetings another approaches.

"Well?" says Drexel at the approach of this second man; "What is it?"

"Nothing more, sir, I'm sorry to say," is the respectful reply; "the two strangers are with Schenck, and are on their way here in a carriage. Schenck would never stay away from such a meeting as this, and it's certain, from what Halle overheard, that the three intend to spend the evening together—if only they prove to be the right parties."

"We must find that out at once," Drexel says promptly.

"Yes, sir; but if you will allow me to suggest——"

"Go on."

"I was about to say that I think I can find out who the speakers are to be, by making my way over to the place where you see those coloured lights. If Schenck is to be one of the speakers I shall then know about where to take you; but if, as some of us fear, this is to be a boisterous meeting, I don't believe Schenck will be one of the speakers."

"Why?"

"Because the man's a born fire-bug and dynamiter. If there's dirty work to be done, Schenck's rôle will be to go about in the crowd, stirring up bad blood, shouting out incendiary doctrine, whenever he thinks himself far enough away from the police. That man's dangerous. Shall I locate Schenck, sir?"

"Yes, if you can without too much loss of time. We will wait here." Almost as he spoke, the officer who had volunteered to find the man Schenck had disappeared in the crowd. Drexel turned to the companion who had joined him first.

"Do *you* anticipate trouble of any sort?" he asked.

"We hardly know, sir. Some of the leaders here are rampant fellows—men whose sentiments are enough to cause their arrest if publicly uttered, as they may be here to-night. There's been a deal of ugly talk, and all sorts of rumours; some threats, too, publicly uttered, but not easy to trace home. There's an uneasy feeling among them that's 'inside' and claim to know what's in the wind. That's about all I know, except that there's an unusually large detail of patrolmen on duty here, and others in reserve at the station. I'm sure I hope all will go off in tall talk, there's bound to be *that*. This would be an ugly place for a riot, so ill lighted and sort of hemmed in."

Drexel makes no reply. He is watching the constantly-growing crowd and thinking shudderingly of those packages carried by his two unsuspecting friends, at the behest of the "council."

"See," says the other after a time, "they are crowding over that way, toward those high steps and the carts there; and, yes, some of the speakers are gathering there now. Jupiter!" As the noise

increased and the crowd surged towards the point he had indicated. "*Look* at them; but they are a rough lot! What per cent. of American citizens will you find there now?"

"The class of 'American citizens' which keeps you and your fellows busiest, and gives you most trouble, will be fairly well represented there, I fancy," replied Drexel.

"Right you are," says the officer quickly; and then adds, "and yet these fellows are here, they say, in the interest of the 'downtrodden working-man.'"

"Hush!" says Drexel; and the speaker turns to see his brother officer, close beside them.

"Come," says the latter, and turns at once, and begins to force his way through the edge of the crowd, closely followed by the other two.

Somebody is speaking to such as care to listen, standing upon the steps of a corner building; but he is not a star of magnitude, and except for a small circle near him, is quite unheeded, the clamour growing in volume all about them. The three men have made their way around the crowd until they have skirted it on three sides, and are now upon its western border and near the place where the street becomes narrower.

Here the leader pauses and says, "They came in a carriage, as I thought they would, and down that street," pointing down a side street. "They have driven down that way," pointing down a diverging street and northward, "and the carriage was surrounded in a moment by a dozen or more men who seemed to be waiting. They seemed likely, from their movements, to stop there long enough to settle some question which appeared to interest them, and so I came for you." He moved away a few paces, and spoke to a policeman standing at his post.

"That carriage there still?" The officer nodded, and the scout beckoned to his companions. "Come," he said; "now is your chance. You can get a *look* at them, at least; we can't get very close *yet*, I fear."

"Let me *see* them," said Drexel; "the rest must come as it will."

A little more elbowing and pushing and they come out into more open space, and turning the corner, saw, a little beyond, and so near a gas-lamp as to seem really conspicuous, an open carriage, in which sat four men. There was a crowd about it, and Drexel, who now assumed the leadership, saw at once that to approach within speaking distance would be quite impossible.

"Let us pass—slowly," he said, and they moved on.

Drexel passed the carriage without a sign of interest upon his face, but he stopped short a little beyond in the shadow.

"You were right," he said to the officer who had played the scout. "Those are the men." There was silence a moment, and then he added: "And now, gentlemen, I am going to trust you, as I have been assured that I can. Those two young men are *dupes*, sent here by their superiors. They are the bearers of packages, which, they have been told, contain revolutionary pamphlets, to be distributed among these people; but which, I fully believe, *really* contain dynamite

bombs, manufactured for them by a pair of old Russian nihilists. Those who sent these young men mean that they shall *not return to New York*. There is an ugly plot behind all this, but of that I can say no more. I am here to save those two men, and to prevent, if possible, the use of the dynamite. Shall I have your help?"

"We are here at your service, Mr. Hurst," said the spokesman for the two.

A few minutes later the three have scattered, and are mingling with the crowd near the carriage. And now the men about the carriage move a little away, just enough to allow the horses to move forward at a slow pace; and so it moves on, surrounded still by its hedging escort, until it has rounded the corner and halts again; this time in the shadow, and as close to the throng as possible. There, as before, the press about the vehicle is impenetrable. And now, a little aloof, but where they can plainly see it, the three men draw together again.

"Well," says Drexel, hastily, "what have you discovered?"

"I think those fellows are acting in concert in surrounding the carriage in that manner; they want to prevent the young fellows from escaping."

"Or to keep someone, an officer, perhaps, from approaching them," hazards number two.

"Or both," adds Drexel. "Is that all?"

"No," says number two. "I got near enough to see that they have in the carriage two valises of medium size. Perhaps it is the valises they are so anxious to guard."

"If I could get those valises into my possession," says Drexel, "this meeting might go on as it would." And then the three draw aside again, while he gives his final instructions.

They are to separate and, mingling with the crowd, strive, each as he best can, to get within speaking distance of the two young men.

"Half-a-dozen words will be sufficient," Drexel assures them, and he whispers to each the potent words, adding: "They will understand, and give or allow you *to take* those dangerous valises." And so they separate.

Who of all that throng can tell the complete story of that night? How, under the lash of fiery tongues, the swaying crowds were aroused and urged on? How enthusiasm became aggressive, and oaths and threats, cheers, groans, and hisses, mingled?

And still those serpent-tongued apostles of revolution, those disciples of the gospel of intimidation and force, lashed the air with plausible sophistry, and roused that mass of humanity to uproariousness, until order is no more. The law is openly defied, and, for the first time in a free country, anarchy openly shows its teeth and claws. And now, at last, those orators whose trade is anarchy, may cease from their labours. They have wrought the mass before and about them into a howling insubordinate mob, no longer to be restrained by voice or peaceful measures; and there it surges and breathes defiance, and menaces the gallant sons of the city who have responded to a

call for protection for the vindication of outraged and insulted law and order. "*In the name of Peace you are bidden to disperse.*"

No need to write the history of the Haymarket slaughter. It has been written in blood—upon the field, in the hospital—on the scaffold.

While the sound of the death-dealing missile still echoed in their ears, and the groans and shrieks of the injured still rend the air, a gallant deed, unseen and unrecorded, was enacted in the midst of the fire, and blood, and disaster all around.

Up to the time of the explosion, Savorin and Hosmer had been so closely surrounded as to render approach impossible; but a little before it they had descended from their carriage, and, with the mysterious valises in hand, and closely guarded, had been conducted forward and through the edge of the crowd, until they had reached a position a little aloof from the crowd and nearer the place where the main body of the police had finally formed.

Just how it came about may never be known; but at the moment of the explosion, Savorin and Hosmer stood, for the first time, *alone.* A moment before, Drexel, watching not far away, had seen a stir about his two friends. There seemed to be a discussion and an argument; then, suddenly, a swift movement, pushing and crowding, a changing of places, and a closer pressing about the two young men. Then the crowd opened suddenly at one point, and a man, bearing one of the two valises, dashed through and out of sight. In an instant, before the crowd could close up again, Drexel had hurled himself in among them. He had a glimpse of Rene and Hosmer standing close together, and he called to them over the heads about him. Then there was another movement of the crowd. He saw a man leap toward the two and strive to wrest the valise from their hands; saw their resistance, and had a glimpse of an arm shooting out, of the assailant reeling. In the same instant he realized that the crowd was thinning, and he reached the side of his friends at the moment when that hideous explosion sounded out above the yells of the leaders, the commands of the officers, and the babel of the mob.

What had happened?

When Roger Drexel was once more able to pause and consider, after what seemed an age of violent breathless action, this is what he could recall.

As the crowd fell away from Hosmer and Savorin, he had bounded toward them, and the two detectives were equally prompt. Then there had come that moment of chaos, that shower of falling missiles; he had seen Rene Savorin, with the valise clutched in his hand, reel, struck by a flying something, had shouted out a command, and snatched away the fatal valise as Savorin went down.

Then—for long afterwards, Drexel shuddered, brave man though he was, at thought of moments that followed. With the flying fire all about him, and that bag of death-dealing bombs in his hand, he dashed away bearing, at deadliest risk, the missiles of death out of way of the fiery fragments. On he went with his burden, no one heeding him now, until he was away beyond the utmost stragglers on the outskirts of the panic-stricken gathering, and then he paused to look about him. Just beyond was a cottage, dark and seemingly

tenantless, the street all about him was deserted, and he lost no time in putting his unsafe burden carefully on the inside of the cottage fence in the corner farthest from the gate.

Then he was back again, and somehow found himself once more beside Rene Savorin, who had been carried out of the street and was being supported by Hosmer and one of the detectives.

Then came the hideous moments of waiting until a carriage had been secured by the absent detective, and brought as near as was possible. They carried their insensible burden to the waiting vehicle, and then Drexel left them, avoiding the throng, and stealing back to the place where he had left the bombs, securing them without molestation, and never pausing nor resting until they were safely locked in his own room at the hotel, where he had bidden them carry Savorin.

Ah! the blood that flowed that fatal night! The sighs and groans! the suffering and sorrow and loss that followed that foul deed! The morning dawned upon a city in mourning for her brave guardians of the peace, her gallant policemen dead and dying.

In the morning Rene Savorin lay between life and death, with more to fear than to hope for, and it was found that one of the detectives had received an ugly wound upon the head.

When Drexel opened the valise, which he did by carefully cutting the leather, he found as he had expected, half-a-dozen large bombs of the most deadly and destructive sort—the work of an expert.

What had become of the others that had been wrested from the hands of Savorin and Hosmer in the crowd? Was it one or more of these that had dealt out death and pain and terror there in the Haymarket? And were the others, perhaps, reserved for some future occasion? No one ever knew, although, long after, some bombs of the same sort were found in the possession of an arrested anarchist, concealed in his own home. In the absence of positive knowledge, Roger Drexel kept his own council. He turned over the bombs in his own possession to the two detectives who had aided him so efficiently, after first showing Kenneth Hosmer the manner of "documents" he had been carrying about; and, before another night had fallen, was on his way back to New York, leaving Rene Savorin still unconscious, and with little hope for his recovery, but watched over by Hosmer, and secure of all that human skill could do to hold him back from the open jaws of death.

Other lives were menaced, perhaps. Others were helpless and in need of him, and so, wan and sleepless, he turns his face to the east and to Moina.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

RALLYING TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Little Norton had left Madeline at the corner, where Crashaw and Passauf had parted company, and had set out in pursuit of the latter, it was not without some uneasiness. He feared for her; for he recognized the fact that she, and not himself, was now shadowing the chief conspirator. But his task was plain before him, and he

followed Passauf, easily eluding his watchfulness, and keeping him plainly in sight and at close range.

"Evidently," he said to himself, as they turned into an obscure street, and Passauf's pace quickened, "the fellow knows where he is going."

It truth, they were going in the direction taken by Crashaw and Madeline, but by a different route.

It was a long chase, but, like his superior, Passauf preferred to walk. Like him, too, he sought a dingy, squalid quarter of the city, worse, in fact, than that into which Madeline had been led, and not far from it.

"Ah, ha!" muttered Norton, as they plunged into a narrow dirty alley, "I think I know where *you* are going, my friend." And he slackened his pace, and finally stopped short, just before a rickety doorway, where, upon a broken step, a man sat smoking, in a lounging, sleepy attitude. Passauf had passed this person without a glance, but Norton favoured him with a gruff salute, and coolly seated himself beside him, just as Passauf turned and shot a glance over his shoulder, halting, as he did so, before a door some twenty paces beyond Norton.

"Well, Bates," said Little Norton, "how is the lame duck?"

Bates grinned.

"Well," he began, "he appears to be at home to visitors. He has had a call this morning from his physician."

"*Lugos?*"

"Yes, Lugos. He came early, and did not stay long. I wish I might arrest the old villain."

Norton turned a troubled face toward him.

"I wish I felt certain *what* to do," he said. "Hurst has not been heard from these three days, and more than one is beginning to feel anxious. Things seem going wrong somewhere; there's a storm brewing. Is this the first visit from this fellow, Passauf?"

"Passauf. So that's his name. Yes; *he* has not been here before."

"Nor Crashaw?"

"Nor Crashaw."

Norton arose suddenly. "Then *he*, this Passauf, is here as an emissary *from* Crashaw, I am sure. They have been together all the morning. Bates, if this man leaves his hole you know what to do?"

"What to do? I hope so. I am to let him alone so long as I am sure that he can't escape. If he begins to dodge, or becomes troublesome, as a last resort, I am to arrest him, on the charge of assault upon young Price."

"And you have reliable help?"

"I have Colton for relief, and little Deegan—a whole host *he* is—for runner."

"Well, I must leave you. Don't let your man slip through your fingers, Bates. And—I think mine is coming out. Good-bye."

Five minutes later, Passauf, with Little Norton close at his heels, was retracing his steps.

But now the pursuit became a rambling one. Passauf returned to the city like a man who has left his occupation behind him. He was evidently idling now, and when, at last, he entered a "boarding-

house" in a quiet street, principally patronised by foreigners, Norton said to himself, "The fellow's off duty, evidently." He hung about for a time, and finally entered the house, coming boldly into the small room, where half-a-dozen men were lounging, among them Passauf. He asked for board, and after chaffering for some moments, was taken upstairs to see the rooms at his disposal.

As he was coming down at the heels of mine host, Passauf himself pushed past him upon the narrow stairs. He had a key in his hand, and he spoke to the landlord without stopping.

"I am going to sleep," he said; "be sure you call me at three o'clock, Heinrich."

Three o'clock. That would give him at least three hours in which to go back to look for Madeline. Leaving the question of the rooms in debate, Norton tore himself away from the now eager host, and halting the nearest cab, was soon whirling back to the little quiet court where Minna, restless and anxious, kept watch alone.

Madeline's abrupt departure had not been a surprise to Minna, but when she did not return at noon she began to feel anxious, and when half the afternoon passed, and still no Madeline appeared, she went to the window, and placed therein a potted geranium, bearing a single scarlet blossom, the prearranged signal by which to summon Little Norton from the street at need.

He had been at his post for some time, and came promptly, but he was unable to help her, and what he had to say only increased her anxiety. As for himself, Little Norton was already strangely uneasy, and provokingly at a loss.

As evening approached, Minna again put out the signal. This time it was answered by the boy Toole, who had been prevailed upon to leave his post at the deserted house on B—— Street, and relieve Norton in the little court.

Toole explained the situation in his own peculiar way.

"I've been on watch in another place," he began. "I guess you know where."

"Yes, B—— Street."

"Yes'm, but Little Nort says I'm watchin' an empty nest, an' I'd made up my mind to that same. But all the same, I'd a stuck to biz till I was called off, if Nort hadn't a made me see that I'd be a-doin' more good by turnin' to and helpin' *him* out. He said he'd be responserbull."

But Minna was in haste.

"I'm in a hurry," she said, "and if the little man comes back before I do, tell him this: I'm going to the 'Oriental,' where Miss Payne boards, and see if she is there, and I shall go, and come back, as fast as I can."

And this she did. After visiting Madeline's apartment, and being assured that she was not there, she tapped at the door, and was ushered into the presence of the Princess Sacha; but the lady could tell her nothing, and was pained and startled at what Minna had to relate. And poor Minna hastened back to her post, more anxious and apprehensive than before, leaving a new fear to weigh down the already heavy heart of the Princess.

Madam Orloff was better; she had rallied somewhat, and had been placed under the care of a skilled nurse, having grown strangely docile in the hands of Dr. Vaughan, and the Princess was left with time to think and to wonder.

Taken by itself, the absence of such a woman as Madeline Payne might not, would not, be a thing to alarm her, but the fact that Madeline had set out to follow up what she believed to be a clue to the whereabouts of Moina La Croix, and that she had neither returned nor communicated with her friends *was* cause sufficient for uneasiness.

What could she do? What *could* she do? She had put all power, all authority, out of her hands, and did not even know where or how to communicate with Dissett. He might yet be found at his lodgings, perhaps, but she dared not send a messenger, and—how could she go herself?

At eight o'clock Dr. Vaughan came. All day he had been searching for news of Drexel, and, in obedience to Madeline's instruction, had held himself reluctantly aloof from the place where he supposed her to be.

What the Princess had to tell drove the blood from his face.

"I shall go there at once," he said.

"I was sure you would," she cried. "I could hardly wait for your coming. I have never felt more helpless; and you will come back to me at once?"

"As quickly as possible, for I must see my patient again to-night. You shall not wait long, I will come or send."

He saw the fever in her cheek, the look of strained anxiety in the eye, and, without understanding such extreme solicitude, sympathized with it.

It was a long drive, but at half-past nine he was back. His face told its own story. There was no news of Madeline, and the two sat down opposite each other to discuss the strange situation, and evolve, if possible, some hopeful plan of action. As they talked they came to a better understanding; but nothing helpful came of it all, until, at last, the Princess arose with the look of one suddenly resolved upon something unpleasant.

"One thing I *can* do," she said; "and I *will*. I know where I may, perhaps, find a man who can help us, if he will, but *I* must go to him. He would not come, perhaps, if I were to *send*, and besides, we must not lose time. No—I see what you are going to say; but I cannot ask *you* to go alone. It would be useless. He would not receive you. *I* must be the one. But I ask your escort, and—will you call a carriage at once."

Wondering, but compliant and unquestioning, he went; as he handed her to the carriage, a distant clock struck ten.

Almost in silence they drove to the quiet street where, not many days before, she had sought out Dissett in his den. Arrived at the place, she left him at the carriage door, and entered alone. Again, as then, the woman met her almost at the entrance, attracted hither by the sound of the carriage without. But this time she did not mount the stairs; for the rooms above were tenantless. Dissett had gone.

"Bag and baggage," said the woman, with a resentful sniff, "and without a breath of warnin'."

When they were again in the carriage the Princess said, after a few moments of pondering,

"I can see but one thing to be done, and that is for you to go directly to the place which Miss Payne left this morning. If she returns she will come there. If she needs help she will *send* there; and should she come, or send for help, there will be, at the most, only her former maid, and the officer who is on guard about the court, and even *he* may be away upon other duty. In that case there will be only Minna and, perhaps, a boy."

"You are right," he said, quickly. "Under the circumstances, I think I may ignore her commands to remain aloof. I will go at once."

* * * * * *

It was nearing midnight when Roger Drexel arrived in the city, weary and travel-worn, but animated and stimulated by his thoughts of Moina, his anxieties and hopes and fears.

He longed to fly, first and fast, to the place where he had parted from her, and where he supposed her still to be, but prudence and a sense of duty alike forbade.

To approach the La Croix's without some knowledge of what had occurred in his absence, would be a blunder, perhaps a risk; and he must run no risk where Moina was concerned; but, late as it was, he could not be inactive. The Princess would receive him, and to her he must look for information. To her and to Madeline.

And so it happened that, shortly after her return from that fruitless journey in search of Dissett, the Princess received his card from the hand of a night porter, and, five minutes afterward, was pouring into his ear the story of the double disappearance.

"Ah!" she cried. "I see the hand of Providence in this arrival! *You* will know what to do! *You* will find them!"

Notwithstanding her faith, it was a sadly troubled and bewildered detective, who, when he had heard all that she could tell him, took hasty leave, and rushed out upon the street, taking the shortest cut, and avoiding the glare and publicity of the great office.

But he could not avoid it altogether, and as he passed before one of the great windows, his figure was clearly outlined for just a moment, and could be seen by an observer who was not too far from the entrance —could be, and was. As he passed on, and into the shadow, a hand caught his arm in a tight, strong grip, and a voice spoke his name close to his ear,

"*Hurst.*"

"*Norton!*"

With these two, no words were wasted.

"Norton, you're the man I want! What can you tell me? I have just heard that Miss La Croix and Miss Payne are both missing."

"You had better join me, Hurst. I am shadowing Jules Passauf I think—I am quite *sure*—that he can lead us to the La Croix's."

"What is *he* doing here?"

"I don't know. He came here with a little, old man, a stranger •

queer, but well dressed. They entered the café together, and they seemed in haste."

"I will join you," said Drexel.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

ENTRAPPED.

THERE is power in a six-shooter held in a steady hand, even though it be the hand of a woman; and "the Spider," for it was "the Spider" who had appeared before them with curse and menace, was forced to fall back.

Argument was not his forte, and he turned upon the old woman with a mumbled curse.

"You kin put down that gun," the old woman said, with a grin, which she tried vainly to render amiable, "we don't mean to harm you, if you *have* sneaked in on us in this sly way." She drew back with the wily old man, until the full width of the room was between themselves and the two girls, and then conferred together in whispers, keeping a furtive watch upon them meantime.

Moina was sitting erect now. The few re-assuring words that Madeline had spoken had roused her to life, and had kindled a ray of hope in her heart.

"Are you sure," she whispered, the old woman's hissing confidences covering her speech, "are you *sure* he is not hurt—dead?"

"I am sure they have *lied* to you for a purpose," answered Madeline in the same soft whisper, and without withdrawing her eyes or aim. "There has been no exposure, no arrests." And then, as she caught the eye of the scowling old woman, she added, "Be careful, Moina, do not let them see any change in you; try to resume your listlessness, your indifference. I fear they may try to separate us, or do something to prevent our speech with each other, and much depends upon that."

"I understand," breathed Moina, and she let herself drop back upon the couch. But a moment later she lifted herself upon her elbows, and with her face hidden behind Madeline's chair, whispered, "As soon as possible, let us get nearer to papa; I will go now to his room, and as soon as you think best, bring your chair across and sit by the door. Let us *keep together*, I fear that old man."

Madeline made a slight gesture of assent, but gave no other sign that she heard, and Moina arose slowly, passed behind her, and into her father's room.

The two old plotters paused in their talk, and stared hard after her, but seeing Madeline retain her position, they began again, and for this Madeline was thankful enough, for she was sorely perplexed.

She had been told the story of little Frank Price, and "the Spider" had been more than once described to her, so that she had little doubt but that it was "the Spider" who was now in her presence. Indeed, she thought, *two* such men, so lean, so bent, so repulsive, could hardly be found in the same association. In one of Drexel's

last letters he had told her that "the Spider" had been run to earth, and was under close *surveillance*. "His escape is impossible," those had been the words. And yet here was the man. Had he escaped, and, as he had hinted, been sent here by Lugos? Or had he been *permitted* to come here? and was there a watch upon the house? Oh, if only she could know!

Still the two talked on, their earnestness increasing, their glances often seeking her face.

What should she do? What attitude should she take? While they whispered and gesticulated she watched them furtively.

It was nearing three o'clock; would the old woman go out? She no longer wished it! She dreaded to be left there alone with this horrible old man, and what if the woman should expect *her* to go? It was not likely, but if she *should*. "I would *not* go!" declared Madeline to herself, "I will not leave Moina now;" and she resolved to take a high tone, to assume an attitude of suspicion, of disdain. She believed that she knew enough of affairs to enable her to pose, for a little while at least, as one who was on the "inside," and she would try to draw them out. First of all, she must find out if "the Spider" really had seen Lugos, and if so, how long since.

And now the nods and gestures of the two old people began to indicate a better understanding. The conference evidently was about to close. Madeline picked up the little satchel which she had kept at her side, slipped it over her elbow, and holding her pistol conspicuously in hand, grasped her chair and went deliberately across the room, stepping sidewise, and with her eyes upon the two, who watched her with lowering faces.

"What's *that* for?" snapped the old woman, taking a step toward her.

Madeline put the satchel down just within the bed-room door before she spoke.

"Why did I move, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Because *my* business is with my patients."

"The Spider" emitted a sound between a hiss and a snarl, for Madeline was not alone in being perplexed.

Neither "the Spider," nor the old woman were in the full confidence of Lugos and Crashaw, and while overwhelmed with amazement and full of doubt, they were not *sure* that Madeline was not what she claimed to be. That Crashaw had visited here, and Lugos had sought "the Spider" so recently, and yet had said nothing concerning this audacious young woman, who had thrust herself in among them, gave them cause for suspicion. On the other hand, there was her evident knowledge of these men and their affairs.

The old woman had shown annoyance when Madeline had led her to believe that she had lately seen and talked with Lugos, and when she learned that he had also visited "the Spider," her wrath broke out in words.

"Fine times," she said in the old man's ear. "That young vixen over there would like to have me think that he has visited *her*. And here he visits *you* and passes *me* by, and I don't even know if he really

sent for me or not!" She turned to glare at Madeline, "Wot did he say to *you?*"

"I've told you. He was in haste, and he told me to quit that place and come *here*. I was to stay here until further orders, and they'd be sure to *come*, he said, within *twenty-four hours*."

The old woman uttered a sharp sound indicative of gratification.

"Why didn't you tell *that* afore?" she said sharply. "Is that *sure?* Did *he* say it?"

"*Lugos* said it. He said there was to be a *change* within twenty-four hours."

"Well," said the woman, "if they are coming so soon, I know what *we* must do."

"Well—what?"

"We must keep that girl here, *whether she wants or no*, until they come."

"The Spider" had been casting sharp glances at the little satchel by Madeline's side, and he now whispered—

"Wot's in that grip?"

"*I* don't know."

"Well," with a cunning leer, "we must find out, and that soon. Come in here." He nodded his head to indicate the outer room, and added, "We can keep the door open and our eyes too. But let's get further off."

The old woman allowed herself to be drawn across the threshold of the next room and then she stopped.

"This'll do," she said; "now what is it?" and she turned her face toward the inner room, "They can't hear a word here."

The old man took one or two old and soiled fragments of paper from his pocket and said, as he began to unfold the first and held it out before her—

"Seem as if we were talking about this and listen. This girl has forced herself in among us without warning. *We* have not been ordered to receive her, *we* have *every right* to think she's *a spy*. Don't you see that she's a high-flyer? Suppose she has got *money*, don't you see what we could do—*sh!*" As he uttered this last syllable, he clutched at the old woman's arm; his eyes were fixed upon Madeline.

Madeline had been thinking of that fictitious appointment for three o'clock, and wondering if the old woman would keep it. And while thus thinking, she had put her hand to her bodice and drawn forth a tiny jewel-studded watch. It was thrust back almost instantly, but between her half-concealing fingers "the Spider" had caught the glitter of a diamond. It was Madeline's first mistake, and a most unfortunate one. The old woman had also seen, and now *her* eyes were greedy too; she drew back a little further from the doorway, and lent a willing ear to the rasping whispers of "the Spider."

As the plotters talked on, Madeline drew her chair within the doorway of the little bed-room and cast a swift glance at Miles La Croix. Heedless of all about him the old man had fallen into a quiet sleep, and Moina sat beside him, her head resting upon his pillow, her face pale and her big pathetic eyes fixed upon Madeline. She caught Madeline's glance and interpreted it.

"It is a good sleep," she said half-aloud, "at least, I hope so; he has always talked in his sleep before and I think his fever has abated."

"Tell me about his sickness," said Madeline aloud, and the two in the doorway paused to hear, and then, as Moina began to tell of her father's illness, resumed their whispering.

"Let 'em talk," the old woman said; "it won't do 'em any *good*."

"He has been as well as usual until day before yesterday," Moina said. "I think it's an overwrought mind and brain—great anxiety and loss of sleep. It's prostration, I think, rather than disease."

"I understand," said Madeline, with a quick glance. "We must give him something to strengthen him, to stimulate the body and soothe the mind." And then, in a lower tone, "It is needful that we get him into his normal condition as nearly as may be, so that he can be removed from this place without further hurt."

"Where?" whispered Moina.

"Where you will both be among friends," in the same tone, "*and safe*. You have both been victimized, Moina, and taught to fear your truest friends. Believe nothing that these wretches tell you, and *trust me*."

"Oh," breathed Moina, "if we could but go now, while he is quiet! I believe it would be safe, and I cannot bear to think of a long illness *here*. Ah, if only I had some wine! It always does him good."

A sudden thought seized upon Madeline. Why should she not go out boldly if she could find no pretext, procure a cab and a policeman, and take these two poor prisoners boldly away.

She glanced swiftly toward the two plotters. They were talking busily still, and as watchful as at first. Three methods flashed through her mind. If the old woman should decide to go out, she would have against her that old man with his crippled arm. She could hold him at bay, while Moina got her father out of the house, perhaps. Or she might try bribing him; she had money at hand. But if the old woman declined to go out, then *she* might go, as if to meet Lugos. Again she glanced furtively at the two old watchers, and then said, in a low tone,

"There is wine in my satchel. Come nearer, and while you take it out, listen, and don't let your face betray you." Moina moved forward, and lifted the satchel to her knee. "Take out the things until you come to the bottle," went on Madeline, with her face toward the outer room. And she began to unfold her plan, putting in few words the three chances as they had looked to her. "Have you the courage to force your way out so, if your father can be got upon his feet?" she asked, at the last. And as she spoke she saw the two old watchers exchange swift strange glances. Moina was searching for the wine flask, and if Madeline had turned, she would have seen that, at that moment, she had lifted a plump purse from the satchel. It was dropped instantly, and, looking up in affright, Moina, too, saw that look interchanged; saw and understood.

"Don't start," she whispered, "and don't look around. I took out

your purse, not knowing what I held, and *they saw it*. It increases your danger."

"I am afraid that it does increase our difficulty," returned Madeline, and then she raised her voice, and addressed the old woman.

"Please bring me a glass or drinking cup," she said.

A little to her surprise the woman complied, after a whispered word to "the Spider," bringing a heavy flint glass, and putting it in her hand.

Madeline passed it on to Moina. "Drink," she said, "you need strength. And keep it at hand for your father when he wakes." Then she turned sharply upon the old woman.

"What is to be done about M. Lugos?" she asked, indifferently.

"*To* be sure!" Her face took on a look of cunning. "My friend says it would be a fool's errand."

"I'm afraid your 'friend' is not well-informed. Understand, it's nothing to *me*, only—I should, of course, prefer *not* to leave my patient, and unless you go, I *must*."

"Do you *think* so?" meaningly.

"If you know M. Lugos, you know that he is not a man whom it is wise to disappoint," said Madeline, coldly.

For a moment the woman seemed at a loss.

"Where was I to go?" she asked, slowly.

Madeline told her.

"And how long will it take?"

"An hour—perhaps longer."

"What time is it now?"

"It is late—you have no time to lose." The woman glanced over her shoulder. "The Spider" had silently fetched the single chair from the outer room, and seated himself near enough to catch every word. As the woman turned, he said, gruffly,

"You'll stay where you are, Katrien. You'll see Rufi quicker so."

"I have nothing to say to that person. It's very unfortunate that his former shelter is no longer safe for him. He is not here to dictate, but to *hide*. Shall you go, or must I?" said Madeline, icily.

The woman feigned hesitation, scanning Madeline's well-guarded face the while.

"I'll stay here," she said at last.

Madeline's face was still immovable. "Very well," she said, "I think you will regret it." She pushed back her chair and arose. The pistol was still in her hand. She pointed to her hat and the light shawl which lay upon the dingy couch outside. "Be so good as to bring them to me," she said.

As before, the woman complied promptly.

She took the hat, and settled it upon her head, drew the shawl across her arm, and put out her unoccupied hand to Moina. "Slip the satchel handle over my arm, please," she said.

Moina adjusted the satchel, and Madeline turned toward the woman.

"Have you food for this sick man?" she asked, calmly, "or shall I bring something back with me?"

The face of the woman was suddenly overspread with smiles.

"Oh, you're *very* thoughtful, young lady; I've really nothing fit to feed sick or well. If you *would*—anything, you know—just what you will—only—mind, *I* can't pay for *tit bits*."

"Never mind that," said Madeline, and she turned again to Moina. "Give your father the wine when he wakes, I shall be back soon. Please go ahead, madam."

The old woman crossed the room, and as Madeline followed, "the Spider" got up with a grin upon his face. "Good-bye, miss," he said with mock politeness. "Bid her good-bye, Katrien, for you'll not see her *here* again," and he dropped back upon his seat.

Madeline passed him without a word, and the old woman was silent also until they were in the outer room, then she turned almost at the street door, and said,

"I hope he is wrong, miss, and I hope I'm doing right in letting you go *like this*. I shouldn't want to offend M. Lugos, and if——"

A sound behind her caused Madeline to start and turn. Too late, something black and stifling came down over face and shoulders, she was forced backward and down upon the floor, and something cruelly hard and heavy was pressed against her mouth. She struggled fiercely, bravely, but she felt the stifling sensation, and the gag, supplemented by a hand upon her throat and a knee upon her breast, and then all became black around her, she knew no more.

When Madeline recovered consciousness, she found that she had been carried back to the rear room and placed upon the couch, and she opened her eyes to see Moina and the old woman bending over her.

"Oh!" said the woman, seeing her make a movement as if to rise. "You see, miss, *she's* all right enough, and now we'll try and have a better understanding."

Madeline lifted herself upon her elbow and then sat up. She was fully conscious now, and remembered and understood everything; she did not speak, however, and the old woman hurried on.

"You *came* here to please yourself, and *stayed* against my wishes, but I've got a word to say about your going away. You *can't go* yet."

"Do you mean to make me a prisoner, then?"

"You can call yourself anything you like," put in the little old man, "you're here, and here for the present you'll stay. We're no ways certain about you, we've had our orders here, and *your* story don't quite fit in with them, so for the present stay you must. You can play at *nursing*, if you like."

Madeline looked about her, she saw that her pistol was in the hands of the little old man, and her satchel stood open upon the table near him. Involuntarily she put up her hand to her bodice.

"Ah!" she said with flashing eye, "so you have *robbed* me."

"Only taken your things in charge, young lady, taken them for safe keeping. You carry too fine a purse and watch for a plain *nurse*. It ain't safe to let you keep them."

Madeline arose and looked about her, the old woman was still at her side. "The Spider" sat between the solitary window and the doorway. As she made a step forward he lifted the pistol, *her* pistol.

"I'm a pretty good shot myself," he said, with a leer, "and you're going to be put under prison rules. You can go into that room," pointing to La Croix's room, "and you can have the freedom of the side of the room you're now on, from the couch there to the bed-room door, but *don't you cross the line.* You seem to feel pretty plucky *yet*, and, maybe, you think we're not in earnest. You see," with another leer, "we *can't* afford to let you get away, for more reasons than one."

"And you can't afford to *keep* me, for more reasons than one," retorted Madeline. "Do you think I came to this place without thinking of possible risk? Unless I am back in the place whence I came within a certain time, search will be made for me."

The eyes of "the Spider" rested on her face as if he would be glad to make the look a blow, and the leer became a heavy frown.

"If that is so," he said, with a side glance toward the woman Katrien, "we must take good care that they don't *find you* when they come to look here."

Madeline closed her lips and turned away. Whatever had been her thoughts or fears, she had not permitted her face to blanch or her voice to falter, but she knew *now* that words were useless; that she was trapped, and in the hands of a ruthless enemy, that *her jailer was a professional assassin.*

She went back to the door of the sick man's room, and there resumed her former seat, and then she noted the change in Moina. All hope seemed to have left the girl, she was pallid and unnerved, and she sat by her father's bed listless and drooping. The sight of her hopelessness appealed to Madeline's strength, and aroused her sinking courage.

"She must not see *me* falter," she said to herself. "I will *not* falter, there must be a way out of this! They are only two against me." She drew her seat closer to that of Moina and took the girl's listless hand.

"Moina," she whispered, "you *must not* give up, so much depends upon your strength. Lie down there beside your father and try to sleep; you *must*, for, by and by, *I* shall be weary and then *you* must watch. We must not trust ourselves to these old wretches when off our guard. Rouse yourself, Moina, and help me!"

The flask of wine was still at hand, and Moina consented to swallow a little and then lay down beside her sleeping father.

Madeline sat beside her until she sank to sleep, under the influence of the strong wine and the controlling magnetic hand which held and stroked her own; and then she went to the door and addressed the old woman.

"Have the goodness to return me my satchel," she said, calmly; "it contains my medicines. I must have *them.*"

The woman glanced toward "the Spider."

"Take out what you want," he said, "and give her the rest."

The woman took out the purse, and a second flask, which contained brandy, taking time to unscrew the metal top and inhale the fumes of the liquor with evident enjoyment. Purse and flask were then bestowed in a capacious pocket, and, after a careful scrutiny of

the remaining contents of the satchel, she returned it to Madeline with the remark—

"There! Money's no good to you *here*, and *brandy's* too strong for sick people. Ha, ha!"

Madeline made no reply, but made pretence of busying herself with sundry small bottles and packages, while the woman began to move about, bringing from a cupboard, let into the side of the room, some cracked and broken dishes, and making other preparations for supper.

Watching the progress of the meal, Madeline could see that no effort was made to prepare anything to tempt a sick appetite, and a new thought suggested itself.

Did these people *intend* to care for Miles La Croix? Were they anxious for his recovery, or was *he* to become "the Spider's" next victim, followed, perhaps, by herself?

When tea had been prepared over the battered camp-stove the woman brought Madeline a plate, upon which was heaped a liberal supply of butterless bread, some crackers, and cold boiled beef. She took the food, and having seen the bread cut from the loaf from which the old man had already begun to eat, she forced herself to swallow what she could, and washed it down with a sip of wine. The tea she disposed of by pouring the greater part down a knot hole in the uncarpeted floor.

Slowly the day passed and evening came on. The old woman lighted a small and ill-smelling lamp in the outer room, and supplied Madeline with one that was but little better.

"Ye seem inclined to stay in this room," she said, "and I think it's just as well. If you want it, I'll move the couch over, and you can sleep on it here by the door."

But Madeline declined. She would occupy the couch where it stood, when she was inclined, she said, indifferently.

She had determined not to close her eyes that night, and to remain within the little room, beside Moina and her father.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

SLOWLY the evening wore on; there was much low talking in the outer room, and now and then a harsh laugh from the ugly old man. They seemed to pay little heed to those within the small trap-like room, whose single window was boarded up to within a foot of the top, with only a high tight fence visible beyond it. Now and then one of them would pass the door, or pause before it and look in, but they made no further attempt at talk.

Moina slept long and heavily. Her father was the first to awaken; as he opened his eyes and made a feeble movement, Madeline bent over him, and saw with surprise the light of reason in them.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"I am the nurse come to take care of you. Please lie as quiet as possible, sir; your daughter is here beside you, sleeping from sheer

fatigue." He turned weakly, and put out his hand towards Moina. There was no wildness in his eyes or voice; except for his feebleness and pallor he seemed the old Miles La Croix she had known on shipboard.

He put his hand to his head, and said feebly,

"I hardly understand—about coming here, and——"

"You were brought here a few days ago; it was thought best, just for a little while. You are to go back to your old quarters as soon as you are stronger," said Madeline, promptly. "Will you let me give you some bread and wine, and afterward some medicine?"

He looked at her wistfully. "Are you——" he began; but she bent lower and whispered,

"I am one you may trust. A friend of Captain Makowski, who is unavoidably absent;" then, still lower, "we must not talk before these people; will you not let me think for you, and be passive. Ah! Moina is awake." She gave the girl a warning touch, and turned to prepare the bread and wine.

He was very docile in their hands, swallowing the soaked bread, the wine, and tiny quinine globules, and, afterward, the bromide which Madeline, seeing the fever gone down, and feeling that he must be strengthened and made to sleep, had ventured to give him, after consulting with Moina.

"Quinine is his usual tonic," Moina had said; "and he needs sleep *so much*. Oh! if he *can* be made to sleep through this awful night!"

At the end of another hour they saw this wish fulfilled. He fell asleep, quietly and naturally; but his breathing was feeble, and his face was ghastly in its pallor.

Moina hung over him terror-stricken.

"Oh!" she moaned, "what does this mean? All his strength is gone! It was the strength of fever. Just for one little hour he has been his old kind self again. Madeline, tell me—is he dying?"

"Hush, Moina. You are forgetting. Call me nurse. No; I think he is at last in a natural state, and we ought to hope," she turned away, with that pallid face before her, she could say no more, for she felt that unless deliverance came, and came soon, he would surely die. Only skill and care could lift that stricken head. She tried to hide her fears, and to speak hopefully, and she succeeded in quieting Moina's fears and, after much persuasion, in getting her to take a draught of the bromide.

"It is useless for both to watch," she said, "and *I* intend to watch now. If you sleep too long I will wake you, and you will be better able to endure whatever comes. Remember your father, Moina; for *his* sake, you must *not* break down."

"I will do whatever you wish," said Moina, sadly; and after a time she lay again by her father's side, sleeping with her hand holding his.

While she was thus drifting out upon the waves of sleep, Madeline became aware that a more than usual movement was going on in the outer room. The woman Katrien seemed engaged in an effort to make the dingy place look more tidy, sweeping up crumbs and litter, rubbing sundry smoking spots of grease from the battered stove,

lighting a pair of flaring paraffin candles, and removing the untidy fragments of their late meal from the old and rickety table. As she moved about she did not observe her usual precaution, and Madeline soon became aware, by fitting together disjointed fragments of sentences, that the old woman expected a visitor, and that he was to arrive at ten o'clock.

Whom could it be? And what would be the consequences of his coming? It was evident that both "the Spider" and old Katrien were in a high state of expectancy, and she heard enough to understand that this coming visitor was expected to settle some point of disagreement between them.

And now ten o'clock is almost here. Madeline can tell this by the manner of the woman, by her growing restlessness, and her frequent excursions to the outer room. As the moments fly by she can hear the frequent interchange of remarks, and though she cannot catch their words for the most part, she notes that while the woman's tones grow more impatient, more apprehensive and eager, the voice of "the Spider" sounds more and more complacent, as the prospect of a visitor at, or near, ten o'clock, grows less and less. By shifting her position she can see him where he sits near the open doorway, and she sees him consult a battered silver watch from time to time with growing relish. Presently he looks up and chuckles.

"It's half-past ten by *slow* time," he says.

"Then he won't come," growled the old woman. "He said he would not come latter than half-past ten."

"And that means——"

"Hold your tongue, you old fool."

Madeline sighs. She has hoped that this late visitor might prove to be Crashaw, or even Lugos, and she feels sure that she would be safer in the hands of either, than with her present jailers.

By and by, she hears preparations for repose. They are dragging forth blankets and pillows from the second little bed-room, which is used as a place of general storage, pantry, wardrobe, and woodshed; and they arrange two pallets, one in the front room and close to the inner door, and the other, also close to this same door, but on the inside.

Before they take possession of these respective couches, they take care to let Madeline see that "the Spider" will seek his repose armed with a pistol and a long, keen, ugly knife, while the woman is armed with Madeline's own weapon, and cheered by her flask of brandy, which is somewhat less in quantity than at first. She has proffered it to "the Spider," but he has declined.

"I never drink," he says meaningly, "when I have *business* on hand."

For answer she takes a pull at the flask, and approaches Madeline.

"Young woman," she says, "if you want me you can just speak. I'm going to lie down, my bones need resting; but I shan't be *asleep*, as you'll find if you try any tricks."

"Neither shall I," answers Madeline; "I can stay awake if you can, I should think;" and she affects to conceal a yawn. By and by

she gets up, and taking her shawl across her arm, goes boldly to the couch and settles down upon it, purposely making a slight noise in so doing.

"Oh!" calls the old woman; "I thought you were going to sit up."

"You were mistaken, I am merely going to *stay awake;*" and she draws her shawl about her shoulders.

Slowly the minutes pass, and the old woman moves restlessly; but presently something causes her to lie quiet and listen, and then to sit up on her pallet. Then a grin overspreads her countenance. She gets up, listens, takes up the candle, and creeps towards the couch where Madeline lies, her face upturned, breathing softly, regularly, evidently sleeping.

The old woman peers down into her face and holds the candle near; but the closed eyelids do not quiver, the breath comes gently, as before.

"Ah, ho!" she mutters as she goes back to her couch, "that's how she keeps awake! Well, so much the better and the easier!" Before lying down again upon her pallet, she refreshes herself once more from the brandy-flask.

Again long moments of silence drag themselves away; then another sound breaks the stillness—loud, heavy breathing this time; Madam Katrien, reassured by Madeline's feigned slumber, and rendered drowsy by the brandy, has succumbed, and is sleeping.

And now Madeline sits suddenly but silently erect, peers about her, and listens. Still the loud breathing goes on; something stirs in the outer room, then "the Spider's" voice says, in a low tone,

"Katrien!"

Madeline drops back upon her couch lest he should see fit to peer in, and then answers in a loud whisper, "Yes."

"Is that girl asleep?"

"Yes." She hears a chuckle; then he says, "You'd better come in soon, then, before she wakes up."

"Yes," she ventures once more; and even as she speaks she sits erect again and softly slips her shoes from her feet. Then she glides into the bed-room, and kneeling beside Moina, succeeds in waking her by touching her gently, and pressing a hand upon her mouth.

"Moina," she breathes in her ear, "have you the courage to help me now?" Drawing the cover over their two heads to stifle the faintest whisper, she explains the situation, concluding thus: "I want to get their weapons, if possible. If I can get the brandy-flask I will put in enough morphine to keep her sleeping, if she drinks any more. Maybe, I can get outside. If so I will go and find help for you. But you must take my place there under the shawl, so that they may think, if they look out, that we are all sleeping."

"I will go," said Moina, and then she slipped suddenly down from the bed to the floor, rising in a moment with a bar of iron in her hand, three feet in length, and pointed sharply at the end.

"I found this there this morning," she whispers, "and it's

better than no weapon. I will wrap it in my skirt and take it with me."

A few more moments, and there is a form beneath the shawl upon the couch once more, and beneath the covering two little hands are clasped tightly about a rusty iron bar. In the bed-room Madeline has arranged the bed to look as if two forms were lying there, while she waits behind the half-closed door, listening for the slightest sound.

Presently she ventures across the threshold. "The Spider," she knows, lies close to the door, but on the side nearest her, while the woman lies on the further side, nearest the window. To reach her she must pass that doorway. What shall she do?

She does not hesitate long. Things can't be much worse, she thinks, and begins to glide toward the partition behind which "the Spider" lies, wide-awake and watchful, perhaps! "Oh!" she thinks, "if it were only he who lay on the opposite side of the doorway and the woman on this!" On she creeps. To avoid the light from the candle the old woman has spread her pallet in the shadow of the table, and she can scarcely outline the tall figure.

And now she is at the door, she stands still, holding her breath. Then she does a daring thing. "I must know," she says to herself, and leans slightly forward. All is still on the further side of the doorway; slowly, silently she bends, nearer and nearer, until, at last, her head is beyond the doorpost. One swift glance, and she draws back, and waits breathlessly. Close beside the door, so close that he could stretch his hand across the sill, lies "the Spider," upon his side, and with his face toward the door. Fortunate it is for her that only her head is visible from that outer room, and that his gaze is *not* upward. One might fancy, from his attitude, that he was keeping an eye upon the old woman, on the other side.

Is he sleeping? Is he waking? Madeline's heart beats fast. Hasty as was her glance within, she has seen, upon the floor, on a level with his head, and within easy reach of the hand that supports it, that which she longs to possess—"the Spider's" long, keen dagger.

Noiselessly she crouches down until her hand touches the floor, and then with the courage of desperation she bends forward. Lower—lower yet, now she slides her hand around the doorpost, along the baseboard forward; now she touches the handle, and *now*, trembling at her own rashness, she draws back with the dagger in her hand. In another moment she is in the little bed-room, her heart beating wildly, and she is none too soon.

The touch of the weapon makes Madeline bold. Standing in the doorway she traces out the route by which she can keep in the shadow and approach the old woman, screened in part by the sheltering table. Only a few bold movements, and the battle may yet be won.

But now upon the scene comes a new actor, and all is changed. A tiny mouse, exploring beneath the table, has encountered the person of the sleeper there, and, scampering across her open palm, awakes her. She springs up, stifling an exclamation, rises, stretches, and

then, as if recalling some prearranged plan, flings a glance at the form upon the couch, steps to the bed-room door, behind which Madeline has hastily crouched, and, believing that she has seen all her prisoners safely sleeping, goes into the further room, and drops down upon the floor beside the recumbent "Spider." Sitting thus, she can see the occupant of the couch, and is satisfied, believing that Madeline lies sleeping there.

They listen a moment, and hearing no sound draw close together, and begin a ghastly dialogue.

"What are they plotting?" Madeline asks herself this question as she peers out from her retreat; and then she sets her teeth and determines to know. She hears the hum of low voices, and knows that they are stationary, then grasping the dagger firmly, she glides along the wall once more, and towards the communicating door. And now, suddenly, she understands the situation, she has stolen so near that she can see a fold of the old woman's dress lying out upon the floor.

They are sitting, or squatting, close to the wall, he upon his pallet, she upon the floor, and so near that, but for the flimsy partition, she could touch them both.

"I tell you," "the Spider" was saying, "we must look out for ourselves. Crashaw told you this morning that he would be here to-night, if all was well, and Rufi said much the same."

"I know; yes, I know, but——"

"But you hesitate——"

"No I don't. He said, if he neither came nor sent, I might know that matters were serious, and I must give him the dose."

"Well, and do you mean to do it?"

"Of course I mean to do it. I know my business."

"Well, you can't do much, with that girl in the way. Now, you listen to my plan. *You* can't afford to let that girl go any more than *I* can. Oh, I know what *you* want, you think you can starve her out, and patch up some kind of a compromise. You want all the swag, but it won't do."

"Well," she said, sulkily, "what's your precious plan?"

"Just this. Pretend to make a bargain with her, or get her in this room in some other way, then leave the rest to my knife. I'll drag her out and get her into the cottage there, we can hold the keys for a week yet, so she won't be found for *that* time at least, and by then her friends might not know her, perhaps. The place swarms with rats from the old cellar."

Madeline shudders, and her clutch upon the knife tightens.

"*Then*," goes on "the Spider," "we can easily dispose of the old man. It's no use, Katrien, we've got to get away from this, and *you know* we can't leave any witnesses behind. Fool!" with sudden simulation of anger. "Don't you *guess* what that girl *is?*"

"I know she did not come from Rufi."

"But she *did*. Stop, I see I must tell you. Rufi never meant you should know. He sent her here and told her how to conduct herself. That was to give us a provocation," explained the remorseless old

liar. "Then he came to *me*. This girl is a menace to him. Well, I can tell him it was you—that you refused."

"Hush! Hold your tongue! Ah! I see it all now. Yes, you are right. So she is plotting against Rufi; get her out of my sight, Tansig, and to-morrow let Crashaw take care of his black-eyed lady how he will; our work will be done."

As the words leave her lips the listener on the other side bounds across the room and shakes the sleeper on the couch. "Quick," she says, imperatively, "he needs you." The old woman scrambles to her feet, but Madeline has been too quick, she has drawn Moina within the bed-room and closed the door. The noise of their entrance has roused the sick man.

"What is it?" he asks feebly.

There is no alternative, the crisis is come. Madeline's eyes gleam as she sees that Moina is still grasping the bar of iron.

"Moina," she says, "all may soon be over. For all our sakes be brave. Mr. La Croix, you are a brave man, they threaten our lives; mine first, then yours. See, I have secured this door in the only way possible, but it can be broken down easily, and I have *this* for further defence," holding up the dagger.

Madeline was as pale as Moina now, but both were calm. Brave blood flowed in their girlish veins.

"And I," said Moina, "I have this bar, papa."

Miles La Croix was sitting erect upon his bed, his noble white head thrown back, his eyes flashing.

"Girls," he said, in a low tone of command, "quick, move that table across the door, and put all the weight you can on top of it. Moina, keep a chair under that window, and when they attempt to break the door, strike, under cover of their noise, break out those upper panes with your iron bar, and call for help. Someone may hear us. So now, let *me* act as spokesman. Why are they so still I wonder?"

"They are whispering together," said Madeline, with her ear against the door. "The man has missed his dagger, and they know that we have overheard their plot. Ah!"

"Open that door," called the voice of the woman, and Mr. La Croix answered,

"We know your plot, we know it is useless to ask for mercy at your hands, but I would make terms with you."

"What terms?"

"Let these two young women go from this place free and unhurt, and they pledge themselves not to denounce you. Do this, and I will stay here to use as you will."

"Never, papa," cried Moina.

"Never," cried Madeline's clear voice; and then ensued one of the strangest of dialogues, the prisoners vieing with each other in plans of self-sacrifice, and the jailers, knowing themselves committed, growing more and more brutal; "the Spider" because such was his nature, and the woman warming to her rôle as the contents of the flask diminished.

After this talk there was another silence, then a sound from the little store-room.

"Ah!" whispered Madeline, "they are going to batter down the door. At least, let us strike one blow."

Mr. La Croix had armed himself with a rail from the bedstead, but he had little strength to wield it, and with a groan of anguish he saw the two brave girls prepare for the siege. Already they had called loudly for help, and now as the shuffle of feet told of the approach, Moina sprang upon the chair.

Thump—crash—three times the great block of wood was dashed against the door, which, strengthened by the table behind it, resisted; but at every thump a pane of glass came crashing and jingling down, and standing with her head at the opening just made, Moina sent her clear voice ringing through the night—

"Help! *help!* HELP!" and "Help! help! help!" echoed Madeline, calling in the same breath.

"Quick, Moina! they're coming again. Stand close to the wall, and hold your bar ready for a blow. Don't get before the door. Listen; if they throw themselves forward with great force, and the door gives way suddenly, as I think it *will*, one of them may lose their balance. If I could get one of them under my knife——"

"Quick!" said Miles La Croix, excitedly; "it is a chance! Careful, my darling! God help you—God help you! One more appeal to man, children, then turn to God!"

Once again the two voices blend in a loud cry—

"Help! *help!* HELP!"

Outside the battery is ready for a final assault. In the middle of the room stands the old woman and "the Spider"; in front of them, horizontally held, is a huge block of wood, and both of her sturdy arms are straining to hold it at the best height.

"Aim here," says "the Spider," indicating upon the door, and then stepping back to his place beside her; "one more blow must bring it down. Now, remember, don't get in my way; I shall let go as soon as the ram strikes the door." On a chair close beside the door lies his pistol, and that belonging to the woman is similarly placed opposite.

"Throw all your force into the blow—that's *your* part. I'll look out for the shooting," says "the Spider."

"Shall you *shoot* them?"

"Instantly; it's too late for trifling. Now get ready—one, two, three—*now!*"

The door is already weakened, the bolt is shattered, the hinges half gone, the panels split and splintered. It is now as they stand ready that the two girls send out their last cry for aid—

"*Help! help! help!*"

Without the two demons poise their battering-ram. Within a white-haired man lifts clasped hands aloft.

"Oh, God! the Helper—God, the Saviour! Have mercy, have pity——"

"*Now!*" says, "the Spider," and there is a forward rush, a crash, a cry, a blow, a pistol shot; then cries that come neither from besiegers or besieged, a voice outside the window, crashing of glass and splintering of wood, and, above it all, agonized, intense, a voice calling—

"*Moina*—MOINA!" And over and through all else floats the answer back—

"Here—*here! I am here.*" The bar of iron drops from Moina's hands, and she falls forward and lies beside her father across the half-dismantled bed.

As nearly as it could be told this is what has happened. At the moment when the glass fell beneath Moina's blows, rescue was at hand. At the moment when the door was forced in, the party without had brought sufficient force to bear upon the window in front to cause it to yield at once, glass and frame alike, under vigorous blows. Faithful to "the Spider's" suggestion, the woman Katrien had dashed herself and the block of wood against the fated door with force and fury, and no attempt being made to hold the table in its place, and so give it some support, by those inside, table and door went inward with a sudden crash; and so great was the woman's momentum, she was carried forward and prostrated face downward upon the door, one end of which was upheld by the overturned table. It was all done in an instant, but in that instant Madeline Payne had hurled herself upon her, and standing over her with uplifted knife, she cried,

"Dare to come one step nearer, and I plunge your knife into this woman's body!"

"The Spider" had caught up his pistol, and, in spite of her words, he thrust his arm through the doorway and pulled the trigger; but his aim went far amiss, for Moina, standing close against the wall with upraised bar, had brought it down upon the wrist, which, with the hand that held the weapon, was all she could see of the assailant; and the wretch sprang back with a yell, and rushed toward the outer room and straight into the arms of Little Norton.

And so it was that when Drexel and Dr. Vaughan burst into that dingy kitchen, their eyes were greeted by a singular tableau—Madeline, standing pallid and stern above the prostrate woman with the dagger clutched in her hand, Miles La Croix, still sustained by the excitement of the hour, but speechless from contending emotion, and Moina so still and white that Drexel cried out in terror, and, in spite of barriers, was instantly at her side, and gathering her in his arms. At the same moment, Dr. Vaughan half lifted the fallen Katrien, and, consigning her to Norton, turned to Madeline with outstretched hands. Letting the knife fall as it would, she placed her own within them, swaying as if about to fall. And he throws an arm about her, and holds her thus while he looks deep into her eyes.

"Madeline Payne," he cried, "I have been well-nigh mad this horrible night. Tell me, are you unhurt? Have these brutes treated you ill? *What* is the meaning of this horrible scene?"

She lifts her eyes to his, and a great sob rises in her throat. There is no more need for courage, and Madeline becomes a very woman.

"Oh," she cries, "if you had been ten minutes later you might now be looking upon my dead face. They were about to murder us."

"*You!* Oh, my darling, my darling! Curse them, curse them all," cries this staid self-controlled doctor, holding her closer still as if to do so were a matter of course.

When Moina's eyes open, she finds her lover bending over her.

"Oh, Fernand," she sighs, "is it all over, the blackness and horror? Will you take us away?"

"At once, my beloved. The troubles are all at an end. Now we have only to make your father well once more, and to be happy all together."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

How did it come about, this opportune rescue?

In order to ensure prompt obedience to his commands, Dissett had kept Passauf company upon his errand to the Princess, who had luckily arrived, after her fruitless search for Dissett, just in time to receive his messenger.

"I shall wait for you outside, keeping you in sight," said Passauf's stern master, "and I warn you that I shall know it if you try any trick. I know what she will do when she gets that message, and you and I do not leave this house until I see the *proof* that she has been told the truth. This is your last chance."

But Passauf was already conquered. Without this precaution he would have told the truth to Madam La Princess.

That Dissett understood the Princess was speedily proved.

She came sweeping down to the parlour almost at their retreating heels, rang hastily, and ordered the best driver and fastest horses to be had *instantly*.

"I knew it," said Dissett, when they had watched her drive away. "Come, you are to do me one more *favour*, and then we part."

"What is it?"

"Only to return to the room of your friend, M. Crashaw, and bring down to me something which you will find there—I hope."

Outwardly calm though he was, Dissett was inwardly chafing. In the excitement of those awful last moments in Crashaw's room, little wonder that he had gone away and forgotten to take with him the death-dealing cigars. Now he had but one thought, to get them back, and quickly.

Passauf was past remonstrance. Crashaw's room was near, and they hastened on, unconscious that, not far behind them, two keen detectives were running them down.

When they arrived at the place, Dissett stopped in the shadow near the entrance.

"Go up," he said. "and the quieter the better. You will find the door not locked. Unless I overrate the shrewdness of your friend Ligos, you will find two small foreign-looking cigars upon the table under the lamp. Bring them to me, and, *no matter what else you find there*, come away at once and quickly. If you are not back in five minutes, I will send up an officer."

Sullen and wondering, Passauf entered the building, and Dissett stood motionless in the shadow, while, a little further on, two other still figures watched, as keenly as he, the lighted door of entrance.

"We're all right," Little Norton whispered. "I know this place; it's furnished rooms, and, being semi-respectable, has no rear entrance."

The five minutes had not expired when a figure darted out of the doorway and joined Dissett.

"Well?" said the latter.

For a moment there was silence between them, then,

"Did you know what I should find there?" hissed Passauf.

"What *did* you find?" coldly.

"A dead man."

"Heart disease?"

"I have keen eyes, on the table directly before him *was the mark of the dagger point.*"

Dissett put his hand to his pocket, and drew out something shut within its grasp.

"Move a little nearer the light," he said.

For answer Passauf produced a match and lighted it.

"That will do. Now look," he opened his hand, and Passauf saw with starting eyes, the tiny hemisphere which the Princess had placed before M. Lugos at their last meeting. "Do you understand *now?*"

"Yes," respectfully.

"You knew me years ago, Jules Passauf. That man caused the death of my brother and my dearest friend. Still, had it not been for my oath, I doubt if this hand could have taken his life."

"Then—he, too, was condemned."

"Yes, and now—the cigars."

Passauf started, "They were not there," he said.

"*Not there?*"

"No, it was peering about for them that I found the dagger mark. Stop, I think I know who took them!"

"Do you mean——"

"Lugos. He is certain to pounce upon a fine cigar. Shall we try to get them away from him?"

"No, Passauf, there is a fate it. Did he take aught else?"

"Yes, he rifled his pockets, and took certain papers, bank certificates——"

"Belonging to the order?"

"Yes. Am I dismissed?"

For a moment Dissett seemed to have forgotten him, then he said, "Yes, go, and, remember, to-morrow midday must find you out of the city," and as Passauf turned and moved away he added to himself, "As I shall be, as I shall be, I hope!"

Passauf moved away slowly, like one undecided as to his destination, and before Dissett had started from his place, two forms sprang past him, and he saw the taller of the two place a hand upon Passauf's shoulder, there was a moment's parley, and then venturing a little nearer, he heard one of the strangers say,

"That is all we ask of you, if you wish to leave the city in the morning, you had better not refuse."

"Come, then," said Passauf and the three set off across the street.

"Going to take a cab," murmured Dissett. "I must know what this means," and he, too, sought the cab-stand.

The hand upon his shoulder had not startled Passauf. He had taken it for that of Dissett, but the voice that spoke close to his ear had electrified him. He had recognized it, and ejaculated feebly,

"Makofski."

"Makofski no longer, I am Hurst the detective, and I arrest you in the name of the law, but I give you your choice between sleeping in a jail to-night, or in a comfortable bed. You know where Miles La Croix and his daughter have been concealed, lead us to them or go to prison."

"For what?"

"Conspiracy, attempted assassination, complicity in crime. Shall I go on?"

Passauf was growing desperate; he resolved to make one more effort to escape, and to baffle his captors.

"I was to leave the city in the morning," he said. "I *must* go. If I take you to them, will you set me free?"

"Yes," said Little Norton, before Drexel could speak.

"Then we must take a carriage."

When they entered their carriage, Passauf called to the driver, "Go to Avenue B, and then north."

They had gone a long distance on Avenue B, when he told the driver to slacken his speed, and began to look about him. Soon he called a halt and said,

"The carriage had better wait here, I think."

A few steps down the Avenue then a turn, a short block, another turn, and Drexel wheeled upon Passauf and caught his arm in a fierce clutch. He had brought them by a strange and roundabout way to the little court where Drexel had parted from Moina a few short days ago, but where, as he well knew, she was not now to be found.

"You villain!" he cried, "you have wilfully misled us. Miss La Croix and her father were beguiled from this place four days ago. Curse you."

"Hush!" broke in Little Norton, "*somebody* is here, however; look *there!*"

Drexel looked, uttered a cry and bounded forward, shouting back over his shoulder as he went, "Hold him, Norton."

Before the door stood a glistening carriage, and a lady was just in the act of entering it, assisted by a man, whom he saw by the light from the carriage lamps, and recognized as Clarence Vaughan.

"Vaughan!" he cried, "stop, stop!" and he noted even in his mad rush, that the handsome horses were panting and foam-flecked.

"Oh, *what* is it?" cried an impatient voice from the carriage, and the face of the Princess looked out.

Meantime Passauf had been nerving himself for a crisis, when Drexel made his sudden dash for the carriage, he made no movement, but stood staring after him as if amazed.

"What is it?" he asked as if unconscious that Norton's pistol was at his ear. Then as the face of the Princess showed itself at the carriage window, thereby giving Little Norton a genuine surprise, he

struck up the hand which held the pistol, turned, and ran madly around the corner, straight into the clutches of Dissett, who stood behind the sheltering wall, ready, it would seem, and waiting.

"Give it up, Passauf," said Dissett quickly, "you are making me regret my clemency. To save further trouble I will tell you *now* that the power which condemned Crashaw and Lugos put *your* fate in my hands."

The man's head dropped upon his breast. "I cannot fight the council," he said, "I submit."

"Very good, that carriage must pass mine in getting out of this place. I intend to follow it. Something yet remains to be done, and again you must help me, since you have come in my way."

The Princess had seen and recognized Passauf, and she said quickly, grasping something of the situation,

"Let him go, we are going to Miss La Croix, we cannot take him, and there may be need of haste."

In a moment Drexel was in the carriage with Vaughan beside him, the Princess and Minna opposite, and Little Norton outside. And, as they rolled away, the lady leaned toward Roger and put out her hand.

"Thank you for understanding me," she said, "the man whom you let go his way came to me, and told me where to find M. La Croix and his daughter. I have reason to know that he did not lie to *me*. They are prisoners and guarded by an old woman and, perhaps, a man. I see that you remember your promise, Mr. Hurst. But how did you capture this man and where?"

Drexel told her, and when he had described Dissett, she said,

"I think I know that man. He is one I have told you of. He is here to serve me, and you may trust all the rest in his hands; when we have found Moina, and then Madeline, *our* work is done."

Dr. Vaughan sighed. They did not dare to hope that they were so soon to find Madeline.

They were a silent party, and when they had driven near to the mouth of the alley and then halted, Little Norton got down to reconnoitre.

In a moment he was back at the carriage door.

"Here's Bates," he said, "I met him not ten steps away. Come up, Bates," pulling him closer to the window. "Now, out with it. How came you here?"

Bates touched his hat.

"On duty, Mr. Norton, sir. 'The Spider' moved out and took quarters in a little house down an alley right here, soon after you and I separated."

"Who is in the house?"

"Well, I can't quite make out. If it didn't seem impossible, I'd say *ladies*."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Princess.

"There's several people, at any rate," went on Bates, "and I think there's——"

"Help! *help! help!*" Faint, but clear came the cry. Drexel was on the ground in a twinkling, with Vaughan at his heels.

"Ladies," said Drexel, "you cannot come! We must know what the trouble is first. Bates, lead the way. Norton, remain here."

As the men disappeared down the mouth of the alley, the Princess spoke, and if Drexel's tone was commanding, hers was imperious.

"Mr. Norton, follow them at once, we did not come to hinder. The coachman is sufficient protection, if not, these will be," she put two hands out of the carriage window. A silver mounted pistol glittered in each.

Without a word Norton hastened down the dark alley. As he sped away, they heard the second cry for help.

"Just heaven," cried Minna, "there are *two* voices!"

"Coachman," called the Princess.

The man, a young and stalwart fellow, sprang down from his seat and came quickly to the door.

"Coachman, can you shoot?"

"Yes, madam."

"Will you go to the help of those men?"

"Yes, madam; I must find a place for my——"

"*I* will hold the horses," cried Minna, the maid springing out, "I know how to drive."

"Take this," the Princess thrust a pistol into his hand, "it carries six shots; now go quickly!"

Down the alley went another man to the rescue.

Why linger over what followed that happy rescue. Scarce two minutes after the entrance of the succouring party, the willing coachman had rushed gallantly in, arriving just in time to lend welcome help to Bates, who found the infuriated old woman no mean antagonist. None the less was he welcome to Messrs. Vaughan and Drexel, who, now that he had come, found themselves able to bestow all their attention upon the two heroines of an episode which would live in the mind of each, and which received from Olive Girard, when the tale was told her, the title of—"*The defence of the door.*"

Twice that night had Miles La Croix been condemned to death, and the executioner stood ready. Yet, here he lay, trembling and weak to be sure; but with no wildness in his eye, conscious to the full of his late danger; thankful, also, to the full, and growing eloquent, as he told of the high courage, in the face of death, of "his fair defenders."

"The Spider," whose almost cured wrist had been again disabled by Moina's timely blow, had yielded suddenly but without resistance, and was promptly handcuffed and bestowed in a convenient corner. And old Katrien, after a tooth-and-nail remonstrance, was similarly disposed of. Then Little Norton, bethinking himself of the Princess, went gallantly forth to bring her in.

As he emerged from the alley, what was his surprise, to see two men turn away from the carriage window, with two bounds, he was beside it.

"Madam—those men——"

"Are both known to me, sir," said the Princess, with a touch of haughtiness: and with this he was obliged to be satisfied.

In that brief interval of waiting the Princess Sacha Orloff and M. Dissett had met for the last time on earth.

While Minna stood bravely at the heads of the horses, now docile from fatigue, and the Princess looked and listened at the carriage window, two men appeared, and, before the watchful Minna could utter her word of warning, the foremost had doffed his hat and uttered the lady's name.

Turning quickly as he came close, she recognized Jules Passauf. The other stood in the shadow as if to avoid recognition.

"Passauf! What does this mean? You have followed us here!"

"True, madam," he spoke like one reciting a none-too-well-learned lesson; "I bring you a message from Dissett; knowing your wishes, he bids me inform you that your friends are now safe, and that M. Hurst and *his* friends will do well, *and perhaps avoid an unpleasant complication*, if they remain away from M. Lugos and Crashaw, and make no further move until you hear from or *of* them. That your mind may be at ease, he bids me tell you that, *before you received the talisman*, these two had been condemned. Adieu!" he moved back a pace and then spoke again, "Madam, put out your hand. Here is something no other must receive."

She put out her gloved hand, another hovered over it an instant, and then pressed something down upon the palm. Then, without a word, the two figures vanished in the darkness.

"Strange!" spoke the Princess.

"Madam," called Minna, "how odd! It was the little man who hung back and never spoke, that put that thing in your hand." Bending to examine the package, the Princess found that it was *the talisman.*

* * * * * *

In the wee small hours a strange party arrived at the "Oriental." There must be no associations for either Miles La Croix or his daughter, Dr. Vaughan had declared. At the "Oriental" they could feel quite independent, while still surrounded by their friends, and friends they all were now.

Miles La Croix was put to bed, and a faithful nurse placed in charge. He was thoroughly rational, and the doctor prescribed for him rest and quiet, no conversation for at least twenty-four hours, and a stronger anodyne than Doctor Madeline would have ventured to give.

And now to Roger Drexel fell a duty, which he both longed for and dreaded. He must tell Moina La Croix—whom he had won *en* masquerade—the truth. No one else must hear the story of his single-handed war with the "circle," until she had heard and judged him.

And so, when afternoon came, those two sat side by side in Madeline's boudoir, and he took her hand in his.

"Moina, I beg you to hear me, patiently, and not to judge me until you have heard all. Do you promise this?"

"I should be ungrateful if I could not; and, Fernand, it will take a great deal to surprise me, *now*."

He began at the very beginning, told of his foreign travel, of his interest in the "great cause," his folly, and his slow awakening; tracing the process down to the time when he had learned, from a friend abroad, that a foreign "circle" was about to fasten its talons upon this free soil, and introduce here its policy of bloodshed and dynamite.

"When I heard this," he said, "I resolved to find out, and, if possible, drive out this circle."

Then he told of his presence at that meeting, where her father had spoken and Crashaw presided. "That was our first meeting," he said. "You were with Savorin, and I, disguised as a workman, assisted you to leave the hall."

"I remember it well," she murmured.

He told of their next meeting in Madeline's parlour, how he had seen the spy in butternut, and how both had followed her home; and then he took up the story of Mr. Lord's experience with the knife and the letters.

Then came the tale of the dynamite bomb, Mr. Lord's illness, the search for the florist's boy, and the finding of little Frank Price. He told of his alliance with Madeline, of their growing suspicion, and how, by degrees, they had connected Crashaw, Savorin, and La Croix, with the circle.

Then, having permission from the Princess, he connected her with the story.

Link by link he wove the chain: the chance finding of Joseph Parker; the setting of Johnny Deegan on the track of little Hans; the illness of Frank Price, and his pitiful story; how he had written to foreign detectives, and others, and what he had learned from them; and how, at last, he had bearded the lion in his den, and, as Fernand Makofski, made himself one of them.

"Oh," she cried, "I understand now. They *suspected* you, then. *That* was why you left that packet in my care, the night you went to visit the Princess!"

"That night," he said, "I made my famous bargain with the Princess, and convinced myself that she *was* one of the foreign circle; but how did you know of this?"

She flushed rosily, and dropped her eyes. "From papa," she said, "in his sleep;" and then she clasped his arm tightly. "Ah, what danger you were in!"

"My anxiety was as great as my danger, Moina, for, until the night of our encounter, in your father's study, I was not certain of *you*. I feared you were in sympathy with the circle."

"Ah!" she sighed. "Those horrible days! I began to understand the wickedness that was afoot, when papa began to ramble in his sleep, and I tried to do what I could. Once I wrote a letter of warning to Mr. Lord, and, for fear that Madeline might see it and know the writing, I made Margot write the address. Then I overheard a talk between Crashaw and papa, and knew from that, that more mischief was to be done. I heard the names of two who were to be injured in some way, and, fearing that I had not got them right, I went to the study that night to look for them on the list of enemies to the cause—the *black list*."

"And they owe to *you* the safety of their property, perhaps their lives; while *I!* Ah! Moina, that night, when I stood one against five, you saved *me!* Moina, there is one thing I cannot fully understand, *Why* were you so horribly afraid of Crashaw? It was *something* concerning Elias Lord."

"Yes, I knew so well that he was threatened and I was determined to thwart them. One night I heard papa rave about Mr. Lord; he said *he* would be the one to go; that the business with him '*must* end.' The next night he went out alone, and returned very late; that night he raved again, and talked of going there, and of being 'secret and successful.' The next day came the news of the murder of that poor footman. I wonder I did not go *quite* mad, then! Crashaw knew that he was out, and frightened me into consenting to leave B—— Street. I do not *understand* it yet; but I have thought and prayed, and I knew, even before I heard you accuse that evil old man of the crime, I *knew* it was *not* papa! yet I feared they might accuse him; and that would have killed him."

"My poor darling, your father went there, I do not know why, and he asked for Mr. Lord, who was not at home, as you know. It was Tansig, "the Spider," that killed poor Hovey. Your father did not even enter the house. Crashaw was seeking to terrify you for his own vile ends."

"I felt that, too, still I could not *know* that there was no danger, and, in papa's condition, to arrest him would have been fatal to his life or reason."

"His reason is safe now, my darling, and health will come soon, let us hope." She put her hand upon his.

"Sorrow has cleared my vision, my friend. I thank God that papa is himself once more; but health, strength, he will never have again, I am sure of this."

His answer was a silent caress; he could make no other, for she had repeated, almost word for word, the verdict of Dr. Vaughan.

While these two talked on, Madeline and the Princess were coming to a clear understanding. It was Madeline who had sought the interview, and she plunged into her subject at once.

"I am so glad that Madam Petrolowski is better, and quieter," she said. "There is something on my mind, dear madam, and I cannot go on like this, accepting your confidences, and trusted by you, until you have heard the truth. Pray hear me with forbearance, and banish me or not, as you will, when all is told. Madam—I came here, into this house, because *you* were here, and at the request of Mr. Hurst."

"You! are you, then, a *detective?* and *not* Miss Payne?"

"I am Madeline Payne; whether I am worthy to be called a detective, you may decide;" and she dashed into the history of her connection with the war upon the "circle," beginning with her meeting with Moina and the others, upon the ocean; passing from that to Mr. Lord's confidences; and following up the narrative, from her point of view, ending thus:—

"There have been times, of late, when I have thought that my movements, especially my interest in Moina La Croix, must arouse your suspicions; but since your confidence of the night before last,

which I beg you to believe, was not needed to confirm my belief in, and admiration for you, which had been growing stronger daily. Since then I could *see* how your own heavy burden of sorrow and suspense must have made you blind and indifferent to all not closely connected with your own anxieties and interests." She stopped, and both were silent for a space. Then she said, with gentle dignity,

"Dear madam, I have no excuse to offer. What I have done was done to serve, perhaps save, a friend; when I began, you were to me only a beautiful mystery; now, at the end, you are a woman whom I esteem, admire, and long to call my friend."

The Princess had listened to her story at first with simple surprise, then with growing hauteur; at the end, her face was turned away, and she sat thus for many moments. Then she turned, and held out her hand.

"After all," she said, "why should I, of all women, be either angry or surprised! You have done only what *I* would have done in your place; where, then, do we differ? I *was* in one sense a spy. I have been, in truth, a friend of the cause which Lugos, Crashaw, and others like them, so unworthily represent. I came here to report to those in authority in Europe the movements of their representatives here; but, as you know, it was not patriotism alone which prompted me. Under cover of this, I hoped to find trace of—you know whom; and you know that my work here is done."

"But you will not leave us? not yet?"

"If Madam Petrolowski lives and desires to go back, I shall take her. If she does not recover; and, although I know that present danger is past, I doubt if she ever is well, or even able to travel again. If she dies and is buried here, *I* shall remain—all my days, perhaps; in any case, I am done with 'the cause,' there or here." She turned away a moment, and then said, in a different tone, "and now I want to know something more, if you are at liberty to tell it: How did I first come under suspicion? and how was it at last confirmed? M. Hurst never fully explained *that*."

"As a beginning, I believe, he was told by a foreign correspondent that there was likely to be one or more ladies connected with the group here. Later, that wretch Tansig, was seen to bring you a message; M. Savorin was seen to visit you; and suspicion was confirmed when I fished from your waste-basket the blotter containing proof that *one*, at least, of the warning letters received by Mr. Lord was written by you, or some one, upon your premises."

"Then it was *you*, after all, who furnished the proof, upon the strength of which M. Hurst 'denounced me to my face,' and then demanded my co-operation," said the Princess, with a half smile. "I think I *shall* call you a detective; and now let me tell you about that blotter. Upon my arrival here, Messrs. Crashaw and Lugos hastened to pay me their respects. I think they fancied that I would make my salon a sort of haven of conspiracy. On that night they talked largely of a terrible man who was a menace to the cause, and proposed to startle him by a warning. M. Crashaw had the bad taste to ask permission to indite this document *here*, and I permitted it.

But the next morning M. Crashaw received a note, acquainting him with the nature of his mistake, and distinctly outlining *my* position. They never repeated the visit, although M. Lugos has twice forced himself into my presence, in a manner more or less hostile. I can't have *you* think worse of me than I deserve, Miss Payne ; I need and want your friendship, and that of sweet Moina La Croix."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

ALL'S WELL.

WHEN Dissett's strange message had been made known to them by the Princess, they decided to follow his advice to the letter ; but she did not make them acquainted with that last sentence concerning the verdict of condemnation.

That evening's papers contained a paragraph, which sent Drexel at once to the Princess. "Let me read you something," he said, and unfolded a copy of *The Bee*:—

"SUDDEN DEATH! *Suicide or Heart Disease: Which?*—At, or near noon to-day, the caretaker of the rooms in Bassett's Block, K—— Street, entered that occupied by a Mr. Rufus Crashaw, an Englishman of means, and found him dead in his chair. There were no signs of violence; the dead man sat in an easy-chair, with his head lying forward on the table. He had not been robbed, and the room was in perfect order." Then followed a string of suggestions, possibilities, and absurdities. Drexel did not stop to read these, but asked, sharply :

"Do you understand this?"

"Yes ; but so help me heaven, it is all unexpected. I may tell you all now : the last words spoken by Jules Passauf last night were these——"

Someone knocked hastily upon the outer door, and a servant entered.

"Madam, a Sister of Mercy." She stepped back, making way for a sad-faced sister.

"Is this Madam the Princess?"

The lady bowed.

"Madam, Jules Passauf believes himself dying. In trying to leave the city he was waylaid, and taken up, in the early morning, for dead. He wishes to see you, to tell you something. He begs you to come at once."

"Will you go with me?" said the Princess, turning to Drexel.

He bowed assent.

Jules Passauf's days were numbered, and he told his story between groans and gasps for breath. Told of his dealings with Dissett from the first ; of his visit to Crashaw ; of the dagger left in the room of Lugos ; of the second visit to Crashaw's room, the finding of the dead man, and the absence of the poisoned cigars. Of how Dissett had followed him when led away by Drexel and Norton, and how he had escaped from one only to fall into the hands of the other. He told how they had followed the carriage of the Princess. "It was Dissett,"

he said, "who put the talisman into your hand, though he would not speak. He would not trust it to *me*, in the darkness."

"Passauf," the Princess bent over him and spoke low, "did he tell you *why* these men were condemned?"

"Only this—someone wrote to Sharlaw, telling how Miles La Croix had been put forward, and how, behind him, they were plotting for personal gain and personal revenge. Letters were exchanged. Then they commissioned Dissett to put full authority into your hands, and to see to it—that those two received extreme penalty—he was to use *me* as he chose." He looked from one to the other. "Is Lugos dead?" he whispered, "if he leaves a cigar it may be somebody's death."

Drexel and the Princess exchanged glances. "I must look to this," he said.

Little could be done for Passauf, and when that little was done they hastened away. In the carriage, Drexel said,

"So my letters to Sharlaw bore bloody fruit. At a time when I felt that, being one against many, I must use every weapon at hand, I wrote to Sharlaw, hoping little from it, but giving an address. He replied, and I wrote again. I told the simple truth, dwelling most on the use they seemed making of La Croix, and detailing certain financial crooked ways. In my *last*, just after Hovey's murder, I told him how two men had lost their lives through reckless blundering. Has Dissett left the city?"

"I begin to understand that man," she said, "he will never be seen here, or in England, again. He has lived for years hungering for revenge. Living or dead he may be, but *we* have seen him for the last time. I felt it last night when I found in the package which he placed in my hand his withdrawal from the circle, and his farewell to it."

An hour later, two men dressed as policemen entered the office of Lugos's hotel, a small and quiet place, and asked for Dr. Lugos.

Dr. Lugos had not been seen that day, but it was not unusual for him to remain all day in his room. He often took his meals elsewhere.

"Our business is urgent," said the spokesman of the two, "show us his room."

Upstairs went the three. There was no answer to their repeated knocks, and one of them bent to the keyhole. "The key is inside," he said, "give us a chair." He mounted upon a chair, looked through the glass of the transom, and sprang hastily down. "Break down the door, *quick!*" he said, "*he's dead.*"

A moment later, and the door came crashing in. In the table stood the dagger, upright still, and newly set a quiver. Upon the floor, the face upturned, distorted, and hideous, lay Lugos. No second glance was needed to know that he was dead.

"Quick!" said the first officer, "go call a doctor, or someone!"

Out dashed the clerk, glad of the errand, and then one officer went quickly down upon his knees beside the stiffened form, and never did robber move swifter, searching against time, while the other watched by the door.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated the searcher, "some man's life is saved!" And he held up the poisoned cigar.

Soon the room was filled with horror-stricken people, and the two officers quickly withdrew. *Their* work was done. "It was only a summons," said one, in answer to an inquiry.

"We will be called as witnesses, Mr. Hurst," said Bates, for the two officers were Bates and Drexel.

"It can't be helped, Bates. It was a desperate case, and there was no other or safer way. We will appear, and tell what we know."

"And shall you call yourself Hurst? No one would *know* you with that face."

"No, I shall call myself Roger, it's a part of my name, and I don't think anyone *will* know me." And so it came about, that at the inquest, which made a great sensation, more because of the knife than for any other reason, the two officers, who gave modest and brief testimony, were described by the reporters as "Officers Rogers and Bates."

Much was made by the newspapers of this "Episode of the Knife," as one of them chose to call it, and paragraphs, similar to the following, appeared in several sheets :—

"There is a dark mystery behind this singular death. The dagger found in the table is as sure an indication of a murder as if it had been found in the dead man's heart instead. Dr. Lugos was a man of forbidding manners, and uncommunicative ; but his death has revealed *this* at least. He was connected with some powerful and vindictive secret order, and he has fallen a victim to its vengeance, *witness the dagger in the wood.*"

But the public, even the reporters had not the keen eyes of Passauf ; and none saw in the death of Crashaw any trace of "the dagger in the wood," nor thought to connect the almost simultaneous taking off of these two fellow-plotters.

* * * * * *

When Tansig, "the Spider," and Katrien found themselves about to be sent to jail, and clamoured for a reason therefore, having shrewdly guessed that the names of Miles and Moina La Croix and Madeline Payne would be shielded if possible, they were struck dumb when told that they were jointly charged with manufacturing, "for unlawful purposes," dynamite bombs, and that little Hans was ready to testify against them. When "the Spider" learned that, in addition to this, he was held for a murderous attack upon little Frank Price, who was still alive, but beyond hope of recovery, he collapsed utterly ; and, later, when they learned that both Lugos and Crashaw were dead, which at first they refused to believe, they saw disaster staring them in the face, and grew abject.

Then the old woman made full confession of Crashaw's sins, more than of her own, and they learned how ruthlessly he had planned, since Moina had persisted in scorning his suit, to remove Miles La

Croix, and so have her, quite alone, imprisoned and at his mercy. When he paid his last visit to that hidden cottage, which had been secured and fitted up by him, he had given the old woman positive orders. If he did not return, or send his messenger, by half-past ten o'clock, Miles La Croix was to be "removed," quietly if possible—but removed in any case. It was with an eye to this contingency that the newly-finished cottage in front had been secured and held unoccupied.

Passauf lingered a few days, and then another paragraph appeared in the daily press.

"On the 7th inst., between midnight and morning, a man, by name Jules Passauf, was hastening toward the Jersey ferry, when he, very foolishly, made a halt near a street light, and consulted a good gold watch. A little further on, while crossing a convenient alley, he was assaulted, clubbed, robbed, and left for dead. He was taken to an hospital, where he died in a few days."

This news only deepened the gloom in which "the Spider" now dwelt. But when, a few days later—poor little Frank Price having passed painlessly out of life—he found himself indicted for murder, and transferred to murderer's row, the wretched creature could no longer face the consequence of his crimes. He feigned illness, seeming in great pain, and begged for an opiate. He was given a safe dose of morphia, and when he found himself getting drowsy under its influence, he wrapped his head in the bedclothes, and, with the aid of the pillows, succeeded in sneaking out of existence, smothered in a drugged and muffled sleep.

A vile life, a coward's death.

And now old Katrien played her last card. The book containing the accounts of the circle, and for which Crashaw and Passauf had made a fruitless search, had been carried away by Miles La Croix, and then stolen by the old woman, who fancied that it might prove valuable.

Now, while all wished to see her kept safely out of mischief, they did not choose to tell all that must be told, in order to secure for her adequate punishment. And so, after some *finesse*, they offered her liberty, provided she renounced her guardianship over little Hans, her grandson. This she reluctantly did; and then old Katrien sunk from sight in her native element.

Officer Bates and his good wife found ample reason to bless the day when they lent aid to Roger Drexel, and shelter to little Hans, and gladly consented to give the boy a home, where he grew and thrived as the *protégé* of Drexel. Johnny Deegan, too, came under his especial care. The boy Toole took him into "partnership" as a boy shadower; and Johnny looks forward hopefully to the day when he shall become a detective, and deservedly famous.

Joseph Parker never had cause to regret the failure of his first attempt at assassination. Elias Lord never did a thing by halves, and when it came to a question of providing for Joseph and his family, he said in his characteristic way,

"Parker is *my* affair! There's a peculiar bond between Joseph and me. You've been running everything to your notion, Drexel, but

you can't run this. If Joseph and Jane had a smaller family, I'd keep them right here in the place of poor Hovey and Mrs. Marvin, who is about to marry the butcher ; but the children are several too many, and Joseph has a spite against the city. So I have bought him a bit of land, and he's going to be a farmer."

The "bit of land" proved to be a respectable farm, and Joseph, humbled and grateful, turned his back upon the unions, and found his troubles over.

The "Oriental," as Mr. La Croix became less of an invalid, and the wearied actors in this long drama recovered from fatigue and shock, became the almost daily resort of Philip and Olive Girard, Elias Lord, Mrs. Ralston and Lawyer Follingsbee.

There was so much to tell, so many tangles to unravel. In a time like this conventionalities were set aside, all barriers went down. Miles La Croix and Elias Lord found in each other mutual attractions, and Mrs. Ralston, when once she was permitted to know Madam Petrolowski, fell in love with her sad, sweet face, and gentle deprecating ways. Every day, after the acquaintance began, found her by madam's bedside, welcomed by the invalid, and giving to the Princess the chance for much-needed rest. One day she left the patient sleeping and sought Dr. Vaughan.

"Doctor," she said, "we are between two evils. The poor woman's death may be hastened by telling the truth, it *is* being hastened by suspense, over and over ; sleeping and waking, it is the same cry, 'If I only knew ; if I only knew !' To-day she said to me, 'I am so near the other world now that the thought that my boy is there, safe and happy, seems no longer terrible. I *believe* him dead, and yet the thought that he may be living and suffering tears my heart-strings, for if he were *living and happy*, he would not keep it from me. Oh, if God would pity me and let me know."

"What ! would you tell her ?" he asked.

"That he is dead. No more than that. Not *how* he died ; heaven forbid ! Talk with her yourself and then judge."

This he did, and one day, after a sudden change for the worse had convinced him that her life at best was only a thing of days, Mrs. Ralston told her that her son was dead.

"God is good," she murmured. "At last I know ! I shall go to him—and soon ; I can wait *now*, and I can rest." And she did, peacefully, in faith and hope, dying at last just as the May birds were singing their first sweet songs. By that time Miles La Croix was able to stand beside her flower-strewn coffin, and pay his tribute to one whose sad story had wrung his heart. And Moina, into whose hands the reins had now fallen, was beginning to talk about looking for a new home ; for they would never go back to B—— Street. And so it chanced a few days after they had buried Madam Petrolowski that Moina sought Madeline for advice.

"Moina, let the house wait, dear. I want to talk of the poor Princess, I am more than anxious about her, now that she has nothing to do but grieve. You know that Rene Savorin does not get better as he ought ?"

"Yes."

Roger Drexel had made a flying trip to Chicago and had brought back a discouraging report.

"Well, do you know, she thinks she ought to go and help Mr. Hosmer take care of him? She feels sure that he is going to die—I know her feelings, and yet she *cannot* go alone. I *wish* I could go with her! What shall we do?"

"Let's ask Roger," said loyal Moina. And they did.

* * * * * *

One week later, Kenneth Hosmer, somewhat pale from watching and confinement, but in every other way a healtheir, happier, and wiser young man than he whom we first saw less than a year before, at odds with all the world—sat beside the bed where lay Rene Savorin, the pale ghost of his former handsome self. Hosmer held an open letter in his hand, and he glanced up, as if from its perusal, with a quizzical smile.

"Well, Rene, old fellow, for a sick man who can't, or won't raise his hand to his mouth, you have contrived to stir up business for tinkers and tailors, preachers, milliners, and goodness knows how many more."

"What do you mean?" asked the sick man, with a faint smile.

Hosmer looked at him intently. "You must rouse him in some way," the doctor had said. "He is going into a decline from simple lack of desire to live. Rouse him, if you can; it *can't* hurt him worse than his present condition is doing."

Hosmer was about to "rouse" him, but he felt more anxious than he dared to show. There was much in that letter that he could not read to Savorin, and what he said was this,

"This letter's from Drexel, and it's deucedly long. I'll cull you the news in my own choice language. To begin, then, a certain fair lady, desiring to come to this city to see, well, say *me*, felt a doubt about the propriety of coming alone; so she applied to the two fair ladies known as Moina and Madeline, of whom we have heard so much of late. I see you are growing interested."

"Yes—go on."

"The question was a momentous one. Those ladies are *all* interested in you—I mean *me*—and so they consulted Roger Drexel."

"Hurst," with another faint smile.

"Hurst, then. And Hurst took counsel of a certain Dr. Vaughan. Well, to be brief, this sensible man was able to solve the riddle. If the Princess Orloff desired to come to Chicago, it was best that she should come, and she *must not* come, of course, without a chaperone. Savorin, if you begin to cut up, I'll not say another word."

"I won't," with eyes shining, and a red spot on either cheek. "Go *on*."

"Then, for this is a double riddle, Miles La Croix ought to go into the country, and how could Miss Moina take him with only her little Bavarian maid as body-guard? Do you see the dilemma? Well, knowing something of those two young ladies, you can, perhaps, fancy that Messrs. Drexel and Vaughan had to do some 'tall talking,' and I suppose they did it. Any way, Roger tells me that it is *settled*.

Yes, my dear fellow, great is friendship. To enable Miles La Croix to drink milk and watch the daisies grow, and that Madam the Princess may come to Chicago in proper state, there will be a quiet double wedding in a certain church in New York on Tuesday next. It will be a great wrong to society that two lovely heiresses should be married without the usual fanfarade, but, of course, they are doing this for philanthropy's sake——"

"Hosmer, for God's sake, *finish*."

"I will. The better to serve their friends, then, these weddings, which *were* to have been celebrated at a later and more 'proper' season, will take place at once, and while Drexel and his bride go together to the country with papa La Croix, Madeline, I mean Mrs. Vaughan, and her husband will accompany the Princess Sacha to this city. We may look for them on Friday."

There were tears in Savorin's eyes. "Hosmer," he whispered, "I can get better *now*. This proves her friendship, and I *can* live upon that."

"It proves her need of you, Rene. Don't you see how all alone she is? Be her faithful friend *now*, and trust all else to time."

THE END.

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